



ROBERTSON'S CHEAP SERIES.

POPULAR READING AT POPULAR PRICES.

ROSAMOND;

OR,

THE YOUTHFUL ERROR.

— BY —

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COMPLETE.

TORONTO:

J. ROSS ROBERTSON, 55 KING-ST. WEST, COR. BAY.

1881.

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ROSAMOND.

CHAPTER I.

THE OWNER OF RIVERSIDE.

All the day long the September rain had fallen, and when the night closed in it showed no sign of weariness, but with the same monotonous patter dropped upon the roof, or beat against the windows of the pleasantly lighted room where a young man sat gazing at the glowing grate, and listening apparently to the noise of the storm without. But neither the winds, nor yet the rain, had a part of that young man's thoughts, for they were with the past, and the chain which linked them to that past was the open letter which lay on the table beside him. For that letter he had waited long and anxiously, wondering what it would contain, and if his overtures for reconciliation with one who had erred far more than himself, would be accepted. It had come at last, and with a gathering coldness at his heart he had read the decision—'she would not be reconciled,' and she bade him 'go his way alone and leave her to herself.'

'It is well,' he said; 'I shall never trouble her again'—and with a feeling of relief, as if a heavy load, a dread of coming evil, had been taken from his mind, he threw the letter upon the table, and leaning back in his cushioned chair, tried to fancy that the last few years of his life were blotted out.

'Could it be so, Ralph Browning would be a different man,' he said aloud; then, as he glanced round the richly furnished room, he continued—'People call me happy. Why was it suffered to be, and must I make a life-long atonement for that early sin?'

In his excitement he arose, and crushing the letter for a moment in his hand, hurled it into the fire; then, going to his private drawer, he took out and opened a neatly folded package, containing a long tress of jet black hair. Shudderingly he wound it around his fingers, laid it over the back of his hand, held it up to the light, and then with a hard, dark look upon his

face, threw it, too, upon the grate, saying aloud. 'Thus perisheth every memento of the past, and I am free again—free as air!'

He walked to the window, and pressing his burning forehead against the cool, damp pane, looked out upon the night. He could not see through the darkness, but had it been day, his eye would have rested on broad acres all his own; for Ralph Browning was a wealthy man, and the house in which he lived was his by right of inheritance from a bachelor uncle for whom he had been named, and who, two years before our story opens, had died, leaving to his nephew the grand old place, called Riverside, from its nearness to the river. It was a most beautiful spot; and when its new master first took possession of it, the maids and matrons of Granby, who had mourned for the elder Browning as people mourn for a good man, felt themselves somewhat consoled from the fact that his successor was young and handsome, and would doubtless prove an invaluable acquisition to their fire-side circles, and furnish a theme for gossip, without which no village can well exist. But in the first of their expectations they were mistaken, for Mr. Browning shunned rather than sought society, and spent the most of his leisure hours in the seclusion of his library, where, as Mrs. Peters, his housekeeper, said, he did nothing but mope over books and walk the floor. 'He was melancholy,' she said; 'there was something workin' on his mind, and what it was she didn't know more'n the dead—though she knew as well as she wanted to that he had been crossed in love for what else would make so many of his hairs grey, and he not yet twenty-five!'

That there was a mystery connected with him was conceded by most of the villagers, and many a curious gaze they bent upon the grave, dignified young man, who seldom joined in their pastimes or intruded himself upon their company. Much sympathy was expressed for him in his loneliness, by the

people of Granby, and more than one young girl would gladly have imposed upon herself the task of cheering that loneliness, but he seemed perfectly invulnerable to maiden charms; and when Mrs. Peters, as she often did, urged him 'to take a wife and be somebody,' he answered quietly, 'I am content to follow the example of my uncle. I shall probably never marry.'

Still he was lonely in his great house—so lonely that, though it hurt his pride to do it, he wrote the letter, the answer to which excited him so terribly, and awoke within his mind a train of thought so absorbing and intense, that he did not hear the summons to supper until Mrs. Peters put her head into the room, asking 'if he were deaf or what?'

Mrs. Peters had been in the elder Browning's household for years, and when the new owner came, she still continued at her post, and exercised over her young master a kind of motherly care, which he permitted because he knew her real worth, and that without her his home would be uncomfortable indeed. On the occasion of which we write, Mrs. Peters was unusually attentive, and to a person at all skilled in female tactics, it was evident that she was about to ask a favour, and had made preparations accordingly. His favourite waffles had been buttered exactly right, the peaches and cream were delicious—the fragrant black tea was neither too strong nor too weak—the fire blazed brightly in the grate—the light from the chandelier fell softly upon the massive silver service and damask cloth;—and with all these creature comforts around him, it is not strange that he forgot the letter and the tress of hair which so lately had blackened on the coals. The moment was propitious, and by the time he had finished his second cup, Mrs. Peters said, 'I have something to propose.'

Leaning back in his chair, he looked inquiringly at her, and she continued: 'You remember Mrs. Lefton, the poor woman who had seen better days, and lived in East Granby?'

'Yes.'

'You know she has been sick, and you gave me leave to carry her anything I chose?'

'Yes.'

'Well, she's dead, poor thing, and what is worse, she hain't no connection, nor never had, and her little daughter Rosamond hain't a place to lay her head.'

'Let her come and sleep with you, then,' said Mr. Browning, rattling his spoon upon the edge of his cup.

'Yes, and what'll she do days?' continued

Mrs. Peters. 'She can't run the streets, that's so; now, I don't believe no great in children, and you certainly don't b'lieve in 'em at all, nor your poor uncle before you; but Rosamond ain't a child; she's thirteen—most a woman—and if you don't mind the expense, I shan't mind the trouble, and she can live here till she finds a place. Her mother, you know, took up millinering to get a living.'

'Certainly, let her come,' answered Mr. Browning, who was noted for his benevolence.

This matter being thus satisfactorily settled, Mrs. Peters arose from the table, while Mr. Browning went back to the olden memories which had haunted him so much that day, and with which there was not mingled a single thought of the little Rosamond, who was to exert so strong an influence upon his future life.

CHAPTER II.

ROSAMOND LEYTON.

Rosamond had been some weeks at Riverside, and during all that time Mr. Browning had scarcely noted her at all. On the first day of her arrival he had spoken kindly to her, asking her how old she was, and how long her mother had been dead, and this was all the attention he had paid her. He did not even yet know the colour of her eyes, or texture of her hair,—whether it were curly or straight, black or brown; but he knew in various ways that she was there—knew it by the sound of dancing feet upon the stairs, which were wont to echo only to Mrs. Peters' heavy thread—knew it by the tasteful air his room suddenly assumed—by the ringing laugh and musical songs which came from the kitchen, and by the thousand changes which the presence of a merry-hearted girl of thirteen brings to a hitherto silent house. Of him Rosamond stood considerably in awe, and though she could willingly have worshipped him for giving her so pleasant a home, she felt afraid of him and kept out of his way, watching him with childish curiosity at a distance, admiring his noble figure, and wondering if she would ever dare speak to him as fearlessly as Mrs. Peters did.

From this woman Rosamond received all a mother's care and though the name of her lost parent was often on her lips, she was beginning to be very happy in her new home, when one day towards the middle of October Mrs. Peters told her that Mr. Browning's only sister, a Mrs. Van Vechten, who lived South, was coming to Riverside, together

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with her son Ben. The lady Mrs. Peters had never seen, but Ben, who was at school in Albany, had spent a vacation there, and she described him as a 'great, good-natured fool,' who cared for nothing but dogs, cigars, fast horses and pretty girls.

Rosamond pushed back the stray curls which had fallen over face, glanced at the cracked mirror which gave her two noses instead of one, and thinking to herself, 'I wonder if he'll care for me,' listened attentively while Mrs. Peters continued—'This Miss Van Vechten is a mighty fine lady, they say, and has heaps of niggers to wait on her at home—but she can't bring 'em here, for I should set 'em free—that's so. I don't believe in't. What was I sayin'? Oh, I know, she can't wait on herself, and wrote to have her brother get some one. He asked me if you'd be willin' to put her clothes, wash her face, and *bhaw* her victuals like enough.'

'Mr. Browning never said that,' interrupted Rosamond, and Mrs. Peters replied—'Well, not that exactly, but he wants you to wait on her generally.'

'I'll do anything reasonable,' answered Rosamond. 'When will she be here?'

'In two or three days,' said Mrs. Peters, 'and I must hurry, or I shan't have them north chambers ready for her. Ben ain't coming quite so soon.'

The two or three days passed rapidly and at the close of the third a carriage laden with trunks stopped before the gate at Riverside, and Mrs. Van Vechten had come. She was a thin, sallow-faced, proud-looking woman, wholly unlike her brother, whose senior she was by many years. She had seen much of the world, and that she was conscious of her own fancied superiority was perceptible in every movement. She was Mrs. Richard Van Vechten, of Alabama—one of the oldest families in the state. Her deceased husband had been United States Senator—she had been to Europe—had seen the Queen on horseback—had passed the residence of the Duchess of Sutherland, and when Rosamond Leyton appeared before her in her neatly-fitting dress of black and asked what she could do for her, she elevated her eyebrows, and coolly surveying the little girl, answered haughtily, 'Comb out my hair.'

'Yes, I will,' thought Rosamond, who had taken a dislike to the grand lady, and suiting the action to the thought, she did comb out her hair, pulling it so unmercifully that Mrs. Van Vechten angrily bade her stop.

'Look at me, girl,' said she; 'did you ever assist at any one's toilet before?'

'I've hooked Mrs. Peters' dress and pinned

on Bridget's collar,' answered Rosamond, her great brown eyes brimming with mischief.

'Disgusting!' returned Mrs. Van Vechten—'I should suppose Ralph would know better than to get me such an ignoramus. Were you hired on purpose to wait on me?'

'Why, no, ma'am—I live here,' answered Rosamond.

'Live here!' repeated Mrs. Van Vechten, 'and pray, what do you do?'

'Nothing much, unless I choose,' said Rosamond, who being a great pet with Mrs. Peters and the other servants, really led a very easy life at Riverside.

Looking curiously into the frank open face of the young girl, Mrs. Van Vechten concluded she was never intended to take a negro's place, and with a wave of her hand she said, 'You may go; I can dress myself alone.'

That evening, as the brother and sister sat together in the parlour, the latter suddenly asked, 'Who is that Rosamond Leyton, and what is she doing here?'

Mr. Browning told her all he knew of the girl, and she continued, 'Do you intend to educate her?'

'Educate her!' said he—'what made you think of that?'

'Because,' she answered, with a sarcastic smile, 'as you expect to do penance the rest of your lifetime, I did not know but you would deem it your duty to educate every beggar who came along.'

The idea of educating Rosamond Leyton was new to Mr. Browning, but he did not tell his sister so—he merely said, 'And suppose I do educate her?'

'In that case,' answered the lady, 'Ben will not pass his college vacations here, as I had intended that he should do.'

'And why not?' asked Mr. Browning.

'Why not?' repeated Mrs. Van Vechten. 'Just as though you did not know how susceptible he is to female beauty, and if you treat this Rosamond as an equal, it will be like him to fall in love with her at once. She is very pretty, you know.'

Mr. Browning did not know any such thing. In fact, he scarcely knew how the young girl looked, but his sister's remark had awakened in him an interest, and after she had retired, which she did early, he rang the bell for Mrs. Peters, who soon appeared in answer to his call.

'Is Rosamond Leyton up?' he asked.

'Yes, sir,' answered Mrs. Peters, wondering at the question.

'Send her to me,' he said, and with redoubled amazement Mrs. Peters carried the message to Rosamond, who was sitting before

the fire, trying in vain to undo an obstinate knot in her boot-string.

'Mr. Browning sent for me!' she exclaimed, her cheeks flushing up. 'Wants to scold me, I suppose, for pulling his sister's hair. I only did what she told me to,' and with a beating heart she started for the parlour.

Rosamond was afraid of Mr. Browning, and feeling sure that he intended to reprove her, she took the chair nearest to the door, and covering her face with her hands, began to cry, saying—'It was ugly in me, I know, to pull Mrs. Van Vechten's hair, and I did it on purpose, too; but I won't do so again, I certainly won't.'

Mr. Browning was confounded. This was the first intimation he had received of the barbaric performance, and for a moment he remained silent, gazing at the little girl. Her figure was very slight, her feet and hands were very small, and her hair, though disordered now and rough, was of a beautiful brown, and fell in heavy curls around her neck. He saw all this at a glance, but her face, the point to which his attention was chiefly directed, he could not see until those little hands were removed, and as a means of accomplishing this he at last said, kindly—'I do not understand you, Rosamond. My sister has entered no complaint, and I did not send for you to censure you. I wish to talk with you—to get acquainted. Will you come and sit by me upon the sofa?'

Rosamond's hands came down from her face, but she did not leave her seat; neither did Mr. Browning now wish to have her, for the light of the chandelier fell full upon her, giving him a much better view of her features than if she had been nearer to him. If, as Mrs. Peters had said, Ben Van Vechten was fond of pretty girls, he in a measure inherited the feeling from his uncle, who was an ardent admirer of the beautiful, and who now felt a glow of satisfaction in knowing that Rosamond Leyton was pretty. It was a merry, sparkling, little face which he looked upon, and though the nose did turn up a trifle, and the mouth rather wide, the soft, brown eyes, and exquisitely fair complexion made ample amends for all. She was never intended for a menial—she would make a beautiful woman—and with thoughts similar to these, Mr. Browning, after completing his survey of her person, said—'Have you been to school much?'

'Always, until I came here,' was her answer; and he continued—'And since then you have not looked in a book, I suppose?'

The brown eyes opened wide as Rosamond

replied,—'Why, yes I have. I've read ever so much in your library when you were gone. Mrs. Peters told me I might,' she added hastily, as she saw his look of surprise, and mistook it for displeasure.

'I am perfectly willing,' he said; 'but what have you read? Tell me.'

Rosamond was interested at once, and while her cheeks glowed and her eyes sparkled, she replied—'Oh I've read Shakespeare's Historical Plays, every one of them—and Childe Harold, and Watt's on the Mind, and Kenilworth, and now I'm right in the middle of the Lady of the Lake. Wasn't Fitz-James the King? I believe he was. When I am older I mean to write a book just like that.'

Mr. Browning could not forbear a smile at her enthusiasm, but without answering her question, he said,—'What do you intend to do until you are old enough?'

Rosamond's countenance fell, and after tapping her foot upon the carpet awhile, she said, 'Mrs. Peters will get me a place by-and-by, and I s'pose I'll have to be a milliner.'

'Do you wish to be one?'

'Why, no; nor mother didn't either, but after father died she had to do something. Father was a kind of a lawyer, and left her poor.'

'Do you wish to go away from here, Rosamond?'

There were tears on the long-fringed eyelashes as the young girl replied, 'No, sir; I'd like to live here always, but there's nothing for me to do.'

'Unless you go to school. How would like that?'

'I have no one to pay the bills,' and the curly head shook mournfully.

'But I have money, Rosamond, and suppose I say that you shall stay here and go to school?'

'Oh, sir, will you say so? May I live with you always?' and forgetting her fear of him in her great joy, Rosamond Leyton crossed over to where he sat, and laying both her hands upon his shoulder, continued—'Are you in earnest, Mr. Browning? May I stay? Oh, I'll be so good to you when you are old and sick!'

It seemed to her that he was old enough to be her father then, and it almost seemed so to him. Giving her a very paternal look, he answered, 'Yes, child, you shall stay as long as you like; and now go, or Mrs. Peters will be wondering what keeps you.'

Rosamond started to leave the room, but ere she reached the door she paused, and turning to Mr. Browning, said, 'You have made me so happy, and I like you so much, I wish you'd let me kiss your hand—may I?'

It was a strange question, and it sent the blood tingling to the very tips of Mr. Browning's fingers.

'Why, ye-es, I don't know. What made you think of that?' he said, and Rosamond replied,—'I always kissed father when he made me very happy. It was all I could do.'

'But I am not your father,' stammered Mr. Browning; 'I shall not be twenty-five until November. Still you can do as you please.'

'Not twenty-five yet?' repeated Rosamond; 'why, I thought you were nearer forty. I don't believe I'd better, though I like you just as well. Good night.'

He heard her go through the hall, up the stairs, through the upper hall, and then all was still again.

'What a strange little creature she is,' he thought; 'so childlike and frank, but how queer that she should ask to kiss me! Wouldn't Susan be shocked if she knew it, and won't she be horrified when I tell her I am going to educate the girl. And suppose Ben does fall in love with her. If he knew a little more, it would not be a bad match. Somebody must keep up our family, or it will become extinct. Susan and I are the only ones left, and I'—here he paused, and starting to his feet, he paced the floor hurriedly, nervously, as if seeking to escape from some pursuing evil. 'It is terrible,' he whispered, 'but I can bear it and will,' and going to his room he sought his pillow to dream strange dreams of tresses black, and ringlets brown,—of fierce, dark eyes, and shining orbs, whose owner had asked to kiss his hand, and mistaken him for her sire.

CHAPTER III.

BEN'S VISIT.

The next morning, as Mrs. Van Vechten was slowly making her toilet alone, there came a gentle rap at her door, and Rosamond Leyton appeared, her face fresh and blooming as a rosebud, her curls brushed back from her forehead, and her voice very respectful, as she said—'I have come to ask your pardon for my roughness yesterday. I can do better, and if you will let me wait on you while you stay, I am sure I shall please you.'

Mrs. Van Vechten could not resist that appeal, and she graciously accepted the girl's offer, asking her the while what had made the change in her behaviour. Always frank and truthful, Rosamond explained to the lady that Mr. Browning's

kindness had filled her with gratitude and determined her to do as she had done. To her Mrs. Van Vechten said nothing, but when she met her brother at the breakfast table, there was an ominous frown upon her face, and the moment they were alone she gave him her opinion without reserve. But Mr. Browning was firm. 'He should have something to live for,' he said, 'and Heaven only knew the lonely hours he passed with no object in which to be interested. Her family, though unfortunate, are highly respectable,' he added, 'and if I can make her a useful ornament in society, it is my duty to do so.'

Mr. Van Vechten knew how useless it would be to remonstrate with him, and she gave up the contest, mentally resolving that 'Ben should not pass his college vacations there.'

When the villagers learned that Mr. Browning intended to educate Rosamond and treat her as his equal, they ascribed it wholly to the influence of his sister, who, of course, had suggested to him an act which seemed every way right and proper. They did not know how the lady opposed it, nor how, for many days, she maintained a cold reserve toward the young girl, who strove in various ways to conciliate her, and at last succeeded so far that she not only accepted her services at her toilet, but even asked of her sometimes to read her to sleep in the afternoon, a process neither long nor tedious, for Mrs. Van Vechten was not literary and by the time the second page was reached she usually nodded her full acquiescence to the author's opinions, and Rosamond was free to do as she pleased.

One afternoon when Mrs. Van Vechten was fast asleep, and Rosamond deep in the 'Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner,' (the former having selected that poem as an opiate because of its musical jingle,) there was the sound of a bounding step upon the stairs, accompanied by the stirring notes of Yankee Doodle, which some one whistled at the top of his voice. Rosamond was about going to see who it was, when the door opened and disclosed to view a long, lank, light-haired, good-natured looking youth, dressed in the extreme of fashion, with a huge gold chain dangling across his vest, and an immense diamond ring upon his little finger. This last he managed to show frequently by caressing his chin, where, by the aid of a microscope, a very little down might possibly have been found! This was Ben! He had just arrived, and learning that his mother was in her room, had entered it unceremoniously. The unexpected apparition of a beautiful young girl startled him, and he introduced himself

to her good graces by the very expressive exclamation, 'Thunder! I beg your pardon, Miss,' he continued, as he met her surprised and reproving glance. 'You scared me so I didn't know what else to say. It's a favourite expression of mine, but I'll quit it, if you say so. Do you live here?'

'I wait upon your mother,' was the quiet answer, which came near wringing from the young man a repetition of the offensive word.

But he remembered himself in time, and then continued, 'How do you know she's my mother? You are right, though. I'm Ben Van Vechten—the veriest dolt in school, they say. But, as an offset, I've got a heart as big as an ox; and now, who are you? I know you are not a waiting-maid!'

Rosamond explained who she was, and then, rather pleased with his off-hand manner, began to question him concerning his journey, and so forth. Ben was delighted. It was not every girl who would of her own accord talk to him, and sitting down beside her, he told her twice that she was handsome, was cautiously winding his arm around her waist, when from the rosewood bedstead there came the sharp, quick word, 'Benjamin!' and, unmindful of Rosamond's presence, Ben leaped into the middle of the room, ejaculating, 'Thunder! mother what do you want?'

'I want her to leave the room,' said Mrs. Van Vechten, pointing toward Rosamond, who, wholly ignorant of the nature of her offence, retreated hastily, wondering how she had displeased the capricious lady.

Although Ben Van Vechten would not have dared to do a thing in direct opposition to his mother's commands, he was not ordinarily afraid of her, and he now listened impatiently, while she told him that Rosamond Leyton was not a fit associate for a young man like himself, 'She was a sort of nobody, whom her brother had undertaken to educate,' she said, 'and though she might be rather pretty, she was low-born and vulgar, as any one could see.'

Ben confessed to a deficiency of eye-sight on that point, and then, as his mother showed no signs of changing the conversation, he left her abruptly, and sauntered off into the garden, where he came suddenly upon Rosamond, who was finishing the Ancient Mariner in the summer-house, her favorite resort.

'So we've met again,' said he, 'and a pretty lecture I've had on your account.'

'Why on my account?' asked Rosamond; and Ben, who never kept a thing to himself, told her in substance all his mother had said.

'She always wakes in the wrong time,' said he, 'and she saw me just as I was about to give you a little bit of a hug—so'—and he proceeded to demonstrate.

Rosamond's temper was up, and equally indignant at mother and son, she started to her feet, exclaiming, 'I'd thank you, sir to let me alone.'

'Whew-ew,' whistled Ben. 'Spunky, ain't you. Now I rather like that. But pray, don't burst a blood vessel. I've no notion of making love to you, if mother does think so. You are too small a girl.'

'Too small a girl,' repeated Rosamond, scornfully. 'I'm fourteen to-morrow—quite too old to be insulted,' and she darted away, followed by the merry laugh of the good-humored Ben.

Two hours before, Rosamond would not have been so excited, for though nearly fourteen, she was in thought and feeling a very child, as was proved by her asking to kiss her benefactor's hand; but Mrs. Van Vechten's remarks, repeated to her by Ben, had wrought in her a change, and, in some respects, transformed her into a woman at once. She did not care so much for the liberties Ben had attempted to take, but his mother's words rankled in her bosom, awakening within her a feeling of bitter resentment; and when, next day, the lady's bell rang out its summons for her to come, she sat still upon the door-step and gave no heed.

'Rosamond,' said Mrs. Peters, 'Mrs. Van Vechten is ringing for you.'

'Let her ring, I'm not going to wait on her any more,' and Rosamond returned to the book she was reading.

Meantime, flurried and impatient, the lady above stairs pulled at the bell-rope, growing more nervous and angry with every pull, until at last, as she heard her brother's step in the hall, she went out to him and said, 'I wish you'd send that girl to me. I've rung at least fifty times: and dare say she's enticing Ben again. I knew it would be so.'

Going hurriedly down the stairs, Mr. Browning sought out Rosamond and said to her, 'My sister is ringing for you.'

'I know it, sir,' and the brown eyes, which heretofore had seemed so soft and gentle, flashed upon him an expression which puzzled him.

'Then why do you not go?' he asked; and the young girl replied, 'I shall not wait upon her any more.'

'Rosamond!' said Mr. Browning. There was severity in the tone of his voice, and Rosamond roused at once.

'She says I am vulgar, and low-born, and have designs upon Ben,' said she, 'and it's a falsehood. My mother was as much a lady

as she. I am not vulgar, and I hate Ben, and I won't stay here if I must wait on her. Shall I go away?'

If Rosamond left, the life of the house went with her. This Mr. Browning knew; but man-like, he did not wish to be conquered by a woman, and after questioning her as to the nature of Mrs. Van Vechten's offence, he answered, 'My sister says some foolish things, I know, but it is my request that you attend to her while she stays, and I expect to be obeyed.'

The last word was unfortunate, for Rosamond had a strong will of her own, and tapping her little foot upon the ground, she said saucily, 'And suppose you are not obeyed?'

He did not tell her she must leave Riverside, but he said, 'You must answer for your disobedience to me, who have certainly some right to control you;' then, fearing that his own high temper might be tried more than he cared to have it, he walked away just in time to avoid hearing her say, 'she cared no more for him than for his sister.'

Rosamond was impulsive not to repent bitterly of her conduct; and though she persisted in leaving Mrs. Van Vechten to herself, and refused to speak to Ben, whose face, in consequence, wore a most melancholy expression, she almost cried herself sick, and at last, startled Mrs. Peters, just as that lady was stepping into bed, by declaring that she must see Mr. Browning before she slept.

Mr. Browning sat in his library alone. He did not usually retire early, but this night he had cause for wakefulness. The burst of passion he had witnessed in his protege, had carried him back to a time when another than little Rosamond Leyton had laughed his wishes to scorn.

'And it is ever thus with them!' he said. 'Are all women furies in disguise?—and Rosamond seemed so gentle, so good.'

He did not hear the low knock on his door, for his thoughts were far away in the south-land, where he had learned his first lesson of womankind. Neither did he hear the light footfall upon the floor, but when a sweet, tearful voice said to him, 'Mr. Browning, are you feeling so badly for me?' he started, and on a hassock at his feet saw Rosamond Leyton. The sight of her was unexpected, and it startled him for a moment, but soon recovering his composure, he said gently: 'Why are you here? I supposed you were in bed.'

Rosamond began to cry, and with her usual impetuosity replied, 'I came to tell you how sorry I am for behaving so rudely

to you. I do try to govern my temper so hard, but it sometimes gets the mastery. Won't you forgive me, sir? It wasn't Rosamond that acted so—it was a vile, wicked somebody else. Will you forgive me?' and in her dread that the coveted forgiveness might be withheld, she forgot that he was only twenty-four, and laid her head upon his knee, sobbing like a little child.

'Had she done like this, how different would my life have been,' thought Mr. Browning, and involuntarily caressing the curly head, he was about to speak, when Rosamond interrupted him, saying,

'I won't deceive you, Mr. Browning, and make you think I'm better than I am. I am sorry I acted so to you, but I don't believe I'm sorry about Mrs. Van Vechten. I don't like her, for she always treats me as though I were not near as good as she, and I can't wait on her any more. Must I? Oh, don't make me,' and she looked beseechingly into his face.

He could not help respecting her for that inborn feeling, which would not permit herself to be trampled down, and though he felt intuitively that she was having her own way after all, he assured her of his forgiveness, and then added: 'Mrs. Van Vechten will not require your services, for she received a letter to-night, saying her presence was needed at home, and she leaves us to-morrow.'

'And Ben?' she asked—'does he go, too?'

'He accompanies his mother to New York,' Mr. Browning said, 'and I believe she intends leaving there with a friend, until his school commences again.'

In spite of herself, Rosamond rather liked Ben, and feeling that she was the cause of his banishment from Riverside, her sympathy was enlisted for him, and she said, 'If I were not here, Ben would stay. Hadn't you rather send me away?'

'No, Rosamond, no; I need you here,' was Mr. Browning's reply, and then as the clock struck eleven, he bade her leave him, saying it was time children like her were in bed.

As he had said, Mrs. Van Vechten was going away, and she came down to breakfast next morning in her travelling dress, appearing very unamiable, and looking very cross at Rosamond, with whom she finally parted without a word of reconciliation. Ben on the contrary was all affability, and managed to speak to her, telling her he should come there again in spite of his mother.

After their departure the household settled back into its usual monotonous way of living, with the exception that Rosamond,

being promoted to the post of an equal, became, in many respects, a real mistress of Riverside, though Mrs. Peters nominally held the reins, and aside from superintending her work, built many castles of the future when her protegee would be a full grown woman and her master still young and handsome!

CHAPTER IV.

ROSAMOND'S EDUCATION.

One year has passed away since Mrs. Van Vechten departed for the South, and up the locust lined avenue which leads to Riverside, the owner of the place is slowly riding. It is not pleasant going home to-night, and so he lingers by the way, wondering why it is that the absence of a child should make so much difference in one's feelings! During the year Rosamond had recited her lessons to him, but with many others he fancied no girl's education could be finished unless she were sent away—and two weeks before the night of which we write he had taken her himself to Atwater Seminary, a distance of more than two hundred miles, and then, with a sense of desolation for which he could not account, he had returned to his home, which was never so lonely before. There was no merry voice within the walls—no tripping feet upon the stairs—no soft, white hand to bathe his forehead when suffering from real or fancied headache—no slippers waiting by his chair—no flowers on the mantel—no bright face at the window—no Rosamond at the door.

Of all this was he thinking that November afternoon, and when at last he reached his home, he went straight to his library, hoping to find a letter there, telling him of her welfare. But letter there was none, and with a feeling of disappointment he started to the parlour. The door was ajar and he caught glimpse of a cheerful blazing fire within the grate. The shutters, too, were open and the curtains were put back just as they used to be when she was there. It seemed like the olden time, and with spirits somewhat enlivened he advanced into the room. His favourite chair stood before the fire, and so near to it that her head was leaning on its arm, sat a young girl. Her back was turned toward him, but he knew that form full well, and joyfully he cried, 'Rosamond, how came you here?'

Amid her smiles and tears, Rosamond attempted to tell him the story of her grievance. She was homesick, and she could not learn half so much at the Atwater Seminary as at home—then too, she hated the straight-

jacket rules, and hated the lady-boarder, who pretended to be sick, and wouldn't let the school girls breathe, especially Rosamond Leyton, for whom she seemed to have conceived a particular aversion.

Pleased as Mr. Browning was to have Rosamond with him again, he did not quite like her reasons for coming back, and he questioned her closely as to the cause of her sudden return.

'I shouldn't have come, perhaps,' said Rosamond, 'if that sick woman hadn't been so nervous and disagreeable. She paid enormous sums for her board, and so Mrs. Lindsay would hardly let us breathe for fear of disturbing her. My room was over hers, and I had to take off my shoes and walk on tip-toe, and even then she complained of me, saying I was rude and noisy, when I tried so hard to be still. I made some hateful remark about her in the hall, which she overheard, and when Mrs. Lindsay scolded me for it, saying she was a very wealthy lady from Florida, and accustomed to every attention at home, I said back some pert things, I suppose, for she threatened to write and tell you, and so I thought I'd come and tell you myself.'

There was a dizzy whirl in Mr. Browning's brain—a pallor about his lips—for a terrible suspicion had flashed upon him, and leaning forward, he said in a voice almost a whisper, 'What was the Florida lady's name?'

'Potter, or Porter—yes, Miss Porter, that was it. But what is the matter? Are you sick?' Rosamond asked, as she saw how white he was.

'Only a sudden faintness. It will soon pass off,' he said. 'Tell me more of her. Did she see you? Were you near her?'

'No,' answered Rosamond. 'She was sick all the time I was there, and did not leave her room. The girls said, though, that she was rather pretty, but had big, black, evil-looking eyes. I don't know why it was, but I felt afraid of her—felt just as though she was my evil genius. I couldn't help it—but you are sick, Mr. Browning—you are pale as a ghost. Lie down upon the sofa, and let me bring the pillows, as I used to do.'

She darted off in the direction of his sleeping-room, unconscious of the voice which called after her, asking if it were not dark in the hall, and bidding her take a light.

'But what does it matter?' he said, as he tottered to the sofa. 'She is not here. Atwater Seminary is two hundred miles away. She can't harm Rosamond now.'

By this time Rosamond came with the

pillows, which she arranged upon the sofa, making him lie down while she sat by, and laid her hand soothingly upon his burning forehead.

'We will have tea in here to-night,' she said, 'I told Mrs. Peters so, and I will make it myself. Do you feel any better?' and she brought her rosy face so near to his that he felt her warm breath upon his cheek.

'Yes, I am better,' he replied, 'but keep your hand upon my forehead. It assures me of your presence, when my eyes are shut.'

So Rosamond sat beside him, and when Mrs. Peters came in to lay the cloth, she found them thus together. Smiling knowingly, she whispered to herself, 'Nater is the same everywhere,' and the good lady bustled in and out, bringing her choicest bits and richest cake in honour of her pet's return. That night, freed from boarding-school restraint, Rosamond slept soundly in her own pleasant chamber, but to Ralph Browning, pacing up and down his room, there came no moment of unconsciousness. He could not forget how near he had been to one who had embittered his whole life—nor yet how near to her young Rosamond had been, and he shuddered as if the latter had escaped an unseen danger. Occasionally, too, the dread thought steel over him, 'suppose she should come here, and with her eagle eyes discover what, if it exists at all, is hidden in the inmost recesses of my heart.'

But of this he had little fear, and when the morning came he was himself again, and, save that it was haggard and pale, his face gave no token of the terrible night he had passed. But what should he do with Rosamond? This was the question which now perplexed him. He had no desire to send her from him again, neither would she have gone if he had—and at last he came to the very sensible conclusion that the school in his own village was quite as good as any, and she accordingly became an attendant at the Gramby Female Seminary. Here she remained for two years and a half, over which time we will pass silently and introduce her again to our readers, when she is nearly eighteen—a graduate—a belle—and the sunshine of Riverside.

CHAPTER V.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

During the time which had elapsed since Ben Van Vechten first made the acquaintance of Rosamond, he had not once been to Riverside, for failing to enter college, and overwhelmed with mortification at his failure, he had returned to Alabama, from

which place he wrote to her occasionally, always addressing her as a little girl, and speaking of himself as a very ancient personage in comparison with herself. But that Rosamond was now no longer a little girl was proved by her finely rounded figure, her intelligent face, her polished manners and self-reliant air. And Rosamond was beautiful, too—so beautiful that strangers invariably asked *who* she was, turning always for a second look, when told she was the adopted sister or daughter—the villagers hardly knew which—of the wealthy Mr. Browning. But whether she were the daughter or the sister of the man with whom she lived, she was in reality the mistress of his household, and those who at first slighted her as the child of a milliner, now gladly paid her homage as one who was to be the heir of Mr. Browning's wealth. He would never marry her, the wise ones thought—would never marry anybody—and so, with this understanding, he was free to talk, walk, and ride with her as often as he chose. He liked her, the people said, but did not love her, while Rosamond herself believed he almost hated her, so strangely cold and harsh was his manner toward her at times.

This coldness had increased of late, and when the Lawries, who, next to Mr. Browning, were the most aristocratic people in the place, suggested that she should accompany them for a few weeks to the Springs, she was delighted with the plan, and nothing doubting that Mr. Browning would be glad to have her out of the way, she went to him for his consent. She found him in his library, apparently so absorbed in reading that he did not observe her approach until she stood between him and the light. Then he looked up quickly, and as she fancied, an expression of displeasure passed over his face.

'Excuse me for disturbing you,' she said, rather petulantly; 'I have to break in upon your privacy if I would see you at all.'

He gave her a searching look and then laying aside his book and folding his arms, said pleasantly, 'I am at your service now, Miss Leyton. What is it you wish?'

Very briefly she stated her request, and then sitting down in the window, awaited his answer. It was not given immediately, and when he did speak, he said—'Rosamond, do you wish to go?'

'Of course I do,' she replied, 'I want to go where it is not as lonesome as I find it here.'

'Lonesome, Rosamond, lonesome,' he repeated, 'Riverside has never been lonesome since——' he passed a moment and then added, 'since you came here.'

The shadow disappeared from Rosamond's

face, as she replied—'I did not suppose you cared to have me here. I thought you did not like me.'

'Not like you, Rosamond?' and over his fine features there came a look of pain, which increased as Rosamond continued:—'You are so cold at times, and shun me as it were; inventing excuses to drive me from you when you know I would rather stay.'

'Oh, Rosamond,' he groaned, 'how mistaken you are. The world would be to me a blank were it not for you; and if my manner is sometimes cold and cruel, it is because stern duty demands it should be so. I cannot lay bare my secret heart to you of all others, but could you know me as I am, you would not censure much, but pity more.' He paused a moment, then, scarcely knowing what he said, he continued—'Rosamond, we will understand each other. I shall never marry—never can marry. In your intercourse with me, will you always remember that?'

'Why, yes,' answered Rosamond, puzzled to comprehend him. 'I'll remember that you say so, but it is not likely you'll keep your word.'

'I am not trifling with you,' he said. 'Marriage is not for me. There is a dreadful reason why I cannot marry, and if at times I am cold towards you, it is because—because—'

Rosamond's eyes were riveted upon his face;—darker and darker they grew, becoming at last almost black in their intensity. She was beginning to understand him, and colouring crimson, she answered bitterly, 'I know what you would say, but you need have no fears, for I never aspired to that honour. Rosamond Leyton has yet to see the man she could love.'

'Rosamond,' and Mr. Browning's voice was so low, so mournful in its tone that it quelled the angry feelings in the young girl's bosom, and she offered no resistance when he came to her side and took her hand in his, saying as he did so—'Listen to me. You came here a little girl, and at first I did not heed you, but you made your presence felt in various ways, until at last I thought I could not live without you. You are a young lady now—the world calls you beautiful. To me you are beautiful. Oh, so beautiful,' and he laid one hand upon her shining hair, softly, tenderly, nay, proudly, as if she had been his child. 'I am not old yet, and it would be natural that we should love each other, but we must not—we cannot.'

'And lest I should love you too well, you have tried to make me hate you,' interrupted Rosamond, trying in vain to release her-

self from his powerful grasp, and adding, 'but you can spare yourself the trouble. I like you too well to hate you; but as I live, I would not marry you if I could. I mean what I say!'

He released her hand, and returning to his chair, laid his head upon the table, while she continued—'I know just about how well you like me—how necessary I am to your comfort, and since fate has decreed that we should be thrown together, let us contribute to each other's happiness as far as in us lies. I will think of you as a brother, if you like, and you shall treat me as a sister, until somebody takes me off your hands. Now, I can't say I shall never marry, for I verily believe I shall. Meantime, you must think of me just as you would if you had a wife. Is it a bargain, Mr. Browning?'

She spoke playfully, but he knew she was in earnest, and from his inmost soul he blessed her for having thus brought the conversation to a close. He would not tell her why he had said to her what he had—it was not what he intended to say, and he knew she was in a measure deceived, but he could not explain to her now; he could not tell her that he trembled for himself far more than for her, and it was not for her then to know how much he loved her nor how that love was wearing his life away because of its great sin. He was growing old now very fast. The shadows of years were on his brow, and Rosamond almost fancied she saw his brown locks turning white. She was a warm-hearted, impulsive girl, and going toward him, she parted from his forehead the hair streaked with grey, saying softly to him. 'Shall it not be so? May I be your sister?'

'Yes, Rosamond, yes,' was his answer; and then, wishing to bring him back to the point from which they started, Rosamond said abruptly—'And what of the Springs? Can I go?'

The descent was a rapid one, but it was what he needed, and lifting up his head, he replied, just as he had done before, 'do you want to go?'

'Not as much as I did when I thought you were angry, and if you would rather, I had quite as lief stay with you.'

'Then stay,' he said, 'and we will have no more misunderstandings.'

The next evening, as he sat alone in the parlour, a servant brought to him a letter, the superscription of which made him reel, as if he would have fallen to the floor. It was nearly four years since he had seen that hand-writing—he had hoped never to look upon it again—but it was there before his eyes, and she who wrote that letter was

coming to Riverside—'would be there in a few days, Providence permitting. Do not commit suicide on my account,' she wrote, 'for I care as little as yourself to have our secret divulged, and unless I find that you are after other prey, I shall keep my own counsel.'

The letter dropped from his nerveless fingers—the objects in the room swam before his eyes, and like one on whom a crushing weight has fallen, he sat bewildered, until the voice of Rosamond aroused him, and fleeing to his chamber he locked the door, and then sat down to think. She was coming to Riverside, and wherefore? He did not wish for a reconciliation now—he would rather live there just as he was, with Rosamond.

'Nothing will escape her,' he said; 'those basilisk eyes will see everything—will ferret out of my love for that fair young girl. Oh, Heaven, is there no escape?'

He heard the voice of Anna Lawrie in the yard. She was coming for Rosamond's decision, and quick as thought he rang the bell, bidding the servant who appeared to send Miss Leyton to him.

'Rosamond,' he said, when she came to the door, 'I have changed my mind. You must go the Springs.'

'But I'd rather stay at home—I do not wish to go,' she said.

'I say you must. So tell Miss Lawrie you will,' he answered, and his eyes flashed almost savagely upon her.

Rosamond waited for no more. She had discovered the impediment to his marrying. It was hereditary insanity, and she had seen the first signs of it in him herself! Magnanimously resolving never to tell a human being, nor let him be chained if she could help it, however furious he might become, she went down to Miss Lawrie, telling her she would go.

One week from that day was fixed upon for their departure, and during that time Rosamond was too much absorbed in dresses and finery to pay much heed to Mr. Browning. Of one thing she was sure, though—he was crazy; for what else made him stalk up and down the gravel-walk, his head bent forward, and his hands behind him, as if intently thinking. Once, when she saw him thus, she longed to go out to him, to tell him she knew his secret, and that she would never leave him, however unmanageable he should become! But his manner toward her now was so strange that she dared not, and she was almost as glad as himself when at last the morning came for her to go.

'Promise me one thing,' he said, as they stood together a moment alone. 'Don't

write until you hear from me, and don't come home until I send for you.'

'And suppose the Lawries come, what then?' she asked, and he replied, 'No matter; stay until I write. Here are five hundred dollars in case of an emergency,' and he thrust a check into her hand. 'Stop,' he continued, as the carriage came round—'did you put your clothes away where no one can see them, or are you taking them all with you?'

'Why no, why should I?' she answered. 'Ain't I coming back?'

'Yes, yes—Heaven only knows,' he said. 'Oh, Rosamond, it may be I am parting with you forever, and at such a moment, is it a sin for you to kiss me? You asked to do so once. Will you do it now?'

'I will,' she replied, and she kissed, unhesitatingly, his quivering lips.

The Lawries were at the door—Mrs. Peters also—and forcing down his emotion, he bade her a calm good-bye. The carriage rolled away, but ere its occupants were six miles from Riverside, every article of dress which had belonged to Rosamond had disappeared from the room, which presented the appearance of an ordinary bed-chamber, and when Mrs. Peters, in great alarm, came to Mr. Browning, asking what he supposed had become of them, he answered quietly—'I have put them in my private closet and locked them up!'

CHAPTER VI.

MARIE PORTER.

The Hotels were crowded with visitors. Every apartment at—Hall, from basement to attic, was full, save two small rooms, eight by ten, so dingy and uncomfortable, that only in case of emergency were they offered to guests. These, from necessity, were taken by the Lawries, but for Rosamond there was scarcely found standing point, unless she were willing to share the apartment of a sickly lady, who had graciously consented to receive any genteel, well-bred person, who looked as though they would be quiet and not rummage her things more than once a day.

'She was a very high-bred woman,' the obsequious attendant said, 'and her room the best in the house; she would not remain much longer, and when she was gone the young lady could have it alone, or share it with her companions. It contained two beds, of course, besides a few nails for dresses.'

'Oh, do take it,' whispered the young Miss Lawrie, who was not yet thoroughly versed in the pleasure of a watering place,

and who cast rueful glances at her cheerless pen, so different from her airy chamber at home.

So Rosamond's trunks were taken to No. 20, whether she herself followed them. The first occupant, it would seem, was quite an invalid, for though it was four in the afternoon, she was still in bed. Great pains, however, had evidently been taken with her toilet, and nothing could have been more perfect than the arrangements of her pillows—her hair—her wrapper, and the crimson shawl she wore about her shoulders. Rosamond bowed to her politely, and then, without noticing her particularly, went over to the side of the room she supposed was to be hers. She had just lain aside her hat when the lady said, 'That open blind lets in too much light. Will you please shut it Miss—I don't know what to call you.'

'Miss Leyton,' answered Rosamond, 'and you are—'

'Miss Porter,' returned the speaker.

'Rosamond started quickly, for she remembered the name, and looking for the first time directly at the lady, she met a pair of large black eyes fixed inquiringly upon her.

'Leyton—Leyton,' replied the lady, 'where have I heard of you before?'

'At Atwater Seminary, perhaps,' suggested Rosamond, a little doubtful as to the manner in which her intelligence would be received.

A shadow flitted over the lady's face, but it was soon succeeded by a smile, and she said graciously, 'Oh, yes, I know. You annoyed me and I annoyed you. It was an even thing, and since we are thrown together again, we will not quarrel about the past. Ain't you going to close that blind? The light shines full upon my face, and, as I did not sleep one wink last night, I am looking horridly to-day.'

'Excuse me, madam,' said Rosamond, 'I was so taken by surprise that I forgot your request,' and she proceeded to shut the blind.

This being done, she divested herself of her soiled garments, washed her face, brushed her curls, and was about going in quest of her companions, when the lady asked if she had friends there. Rosamond replied that she had, at the same time explaining how uncomfortable they were.

'The Hotel is full,' said the lady, 'and they all envy me my room; but if I pay for the best, I am surely entitled to the best. I shall not remain here long, however. Indeed, I did not expect to be here now, but sickness overtook me. I dare say I am the subject of many anxious thoughts to the person I am going to visit.'

There was a half-exultant expression upon the lady's face as she uttered these last words, but in the darkened room, Rosamond did not observe it. She was sorry for one thus detained against her will, and leaning against the foot-board, she said, 'You suffer a great deal from ill health, do you not? Have you always been an invalid?'

'Not always. I was very healthy once, but a great trouble came upon me, shocking my nervous system terribly, and since then I have never seen a well day. I was young when it occurred—about your age, I think. How old are you, Miss Leyton?'

'I am eighteen next October,' was Rosamond's reply, and the lady continued, 'I was older than that. Most nineteen. I am twenty-eight now.'

Rosamond did not know why she said it, but she rejoined quickly, 'Twenty-eight. So is Mr. Browning!'

'Who?' exclaimed the lady, the tone of her voice so sharp—so loud and earnest, that Rosamond was startled, and did not answer for an instant.

When she did, she said, 'I beg your pardon; it is Mr. Browning who is twenty-eight.'

'Ah, yes, I did not quite understand you. I'm a little hard of hearing. Who is Mr. Browning?'

The voice had assumed its usually soft, smooth tone, and Rosamond could not see the rapid beatings of the heart, nor the eager curiosity lurking in the glittering black eyes. The lady seemed indifferent, and smoothed carelessly the rich Valenciennes lace, which edged the sleeve of her cambric wrapper.

'Did you tell me who Mr. Browning was, dear?' and the black eyes wandered over the counterpane, looking ever where but at Rosamond, so fearful was their owner lest they should betray the interest she felt in the answer.

'Mr. Browning,' said Rosamond, 'is—is—I hardly know what he is to me. I went to his house to live when I was a little, friendless orphan, and he very kindly educated me, and made me what I am. I live with him still at Riverside.'

'Ye-es—Riverside—beau-ti-ful name—his country-seat—I—sup-pose,' the words dropped syllable by syllable from the white lips, but there was no quiver in the voice—no ruffle upon her face.

Raising herself upon her elbow, the lady continued, 'Pray don't think me fidgety, but won't you please open that shutter. I did not think it would be so dark. There, that's a good girl. Now, come and sit by me on the bed, and tell me of Riverside.'

Put your feet in the chair, or take this pillow. There, turn a little more to the light. I like to see people when they talk to me.'

Rosamond complied with each request, and then, never dreaming of the close examination to which her face was subjected, she began to speak of her beautiful home—describing it minutely, and dwelling somewhat at length upon the virtues of its owner.

'You like him very much,' the lady said, nodding a little affirmative nod to her own question.

'Yes, very—very much,' was Rosamond's answer; and the lady continued. 'And Mrs. Browning? Do you like her too?'

'There is no Mrs. Browning,' returned Rosamond, adding quickly, as she saw in her auditor's face an expression she did not understand, 'but it is perfectly proper I should live there, for Mrs. Peters, the housekeeper, has charge of me.'

'Perhaps, then, he will marry you,' and the jewelled hands worked nervously under the crimson shawl.

'Oh, no, he won't,' said Rosamond, decidedly, 'he's too old for me. Why his hair is turning gray!'

'That's nothing,' answered the lady, a little sharply. 'Everybody's hair turns gray early now-a-days. Sarah found three or four silver threads in mine, this morning. Miss Leyton, don't you love Mr. Browning?'

'Why, yes,' Rosamond began, and the face upon the pillow assumed a dark and almost fiendish expression. 'Why, yes, I love him as a brother, but nothing else. I respect him for his goodness, but it would be impossible to love him with a marrying love.'

The fierce expression passed away, and Miss Porter was about to speak when Anna Lawrie sent for Rosamond, who excused herself and left the room, thinking that, after all, she should like her old enemy of At-water Seminary very much.

Meantime 'the enemy' had buried her face in the pillows, and clenching her blue veined fists, struck at the empty air, just as she would have struck at the owner of Riverside had he been standing there.

'Fine time he has of it,' she muttered, 'living there with her, and she so young and beautiful. I could have strangled her—the jade!—when she sat here talking so enthusiastically to me, of him! And she loves him, too. I know she does, though she don't know it herself. But I must be wary. I must seem to like this girl—must win her confidence—so I can probe her heart to its core, and if I find they love each other!—she paused a moment, then grinding her

teeth together, added slowly, as if the sound of her voice were musical and sweet, 'Marie Porter will be avenged!'

That strange woman could be a demon or an angel, and as the latter character suited her just now, Rosamond, on her return to her room, found her all gentleness and love.

That night, when all around the house was still, the full moon shone down upon a scene which would have chilled the blood of Ralph Browning and made his heart stand still. Upon a single bedstead near the window Rosamond Leyton lay calmly sleeping—her brown curls floating o'er the pillow—her cheeks flushed with health and beauty—her lips slightly apart and her slender hands folded gracefully upon her bosom. Over her a fierce woman bent—her long, black hair streaming down her back—her eyes blazing with passion—her face the impersonation of malignity and hate; and there she stood, a vulture watching a harmless dove. Rosamond was dreaming of her home, and the ogre, standing near, heard her murmur, 'dear Mr. Browning.'

For a moment Marie Porter stood immovable—then gliding back to her own couch, she whispered, 'It is as I believed, and now if he loves her, the time I've waited for so long has come.'

All that night she lay awake, burning with excitement and thirsting for revenge, and when the morning came, the illness was not feigned which kept her in her bed and wrung from her cries of pain. She was really suffering now, and during the next few days, Rosamond staid almost constantly at her side, administering to her wants, and caring for her so tenderly that hatred died out of the woman's heart, and she pitied the fair young girl, for in those few days she had learned that Rosamond did not know herself, though she was gradually waking up to it now. It was a long time since she had been separated from Mr. Browning, and she missed him so much, following him in fancy through the day, and at night wondering if he were thinking of her, and wishing he could hear the sound of her voice singing to him as she was wont to do when the twilight was over the earth. Anon there crept into her heart a feeling she could not define—a feverish longing to be where he was—a sense of desolation and terrible pain when she thought of his insanity, and the long, dreary years which might ensue when he would lose all knowledge of her. She did not care to talk so much of him now, but Mrs. Porter cared to have her, and caressingly winning the girl's confidence, learned almost everything—learned that there was an impediment to his

marrying, and that Rosamond believed that impediment to be hereditary insanity—learned that he was often fitful and gloomy, treating his ward sometimes with coldness, and again with the utmost tenderness. Of the interview in the library Rosamond did not tell, but she told of every thing else—of his refusing to let her come to the Springs and then compelling her, against her will, to go; and Marie Porter, holding the little hands in hers, and listening to the story, read it all, and read it aright, gloating over the anguish she knew it cost Ralph Browning to see that beautiful girl each day and know he must not win her.

'But I pity her,' she said, 'there is coming to her a terrible awakening.'

Then, for no other reason than a thirst for excitement, she longed to see that awakening, and one day when they sat together alone, she took Rosamond's hand in hers, and examining its scarcely legible lines, said, half playfully, half seriously, 'Rosamond, people have called me a fortune-teller. I inherited the gift from my grandmother, and though I do not pretend to much skill, I can surely read your destiny. You love Mr. Browning. I have known that all along. You think of him by day—you dream of him by night, and no thought is half so sweet as the thought of going home to him. But, Rosamond, you will not marry him. There is an impediment, as you say, but not insanity. I cannot tell you what it is, but I can see,' and she bent nearer to the hand which trembled in her own. 'I can see that for you to marry him, or—mark me, Rosamond—for you even to love him, is a most wicked thing—a dreadful sin in the sight of Heaven, and you must forget him—will you?'

Rosamond had laid her face upon the bed and was sobbing hysterically, for Miss Porter's manner frightened her even more than her words. In reply to the question, 'Will you?' she at last answered passionately, 'No, I won't!' It is not wicked to love him as I do. I am his sister, nothing more.'

Miss Porter's lips curled scornfully a moment, and then she said, 'Let me tell you the story of my life, shall I?'

No answer from Rosamond, and the lady continued: 'When I was about your age I fancied I loved a man who, I think, must have been much like Mr. Browning—'

'No, no,' interrupted Rosamond. 'Nobody was ever like Mr. Browning. I don't want to hear the story. I don't want anything but to go home.'

'I will not tell her until it's more necessary,' thought Miss Porter, 'but if I mistake not she will go home much sooner than she an-

ticipates.' And she was right, for on that very night Mr. Browning sat reading a letter which ran as follows:

'I find myself so happy with your little Rosamond, who chances to be my room-mate, that I have postponed my visit to Riverside until some future time, which, if you continue natural, may never come—but the moment you trespass on forbidden ground, or breathe a word of love into her ear—beware! She loves you. I have found that out, and I tell it because I know it will not make your life more happy, or your punishment easier to bear!'

He did not shrink—he did not faint—he did not move, but from between his teeth two words came like a burning hiss, 'Curse her!' Then, seizing his pen, he dashed off a few lines, bidding Rosamond 'not to delay a single moment, but to come home at once.'

'She knows it all,' he said, 'and now, if she comes here, it will be so much worse. I can but die, let what will happen.'

This letter took Rosamond and the Lawries by surprise but not so Miss Porter. She expected it, and when she saw how eager Rosamond was to go, she smiled a hard bitter smile, and said, 'I've a half a mind to go with you.'

'What! where? To Riverside?' asked Rosamond, suspending her preparations for a moment, and hardly knowing whether she were pleased or not.

'Yes, to Riverside,' returned Miss Porter, 'though on the whole, I think I'd better not. Mr. Browning may not care to see me. If he does, you can write and let me know. Give him my love, and say that if you had not described him so incorrigibly an old bach, I might be coming there to try my powers upon him. I am irresistible in my diamonds. Be sure and tell that; and stay, Rosamond, I must give you some little token of my affection. What shall it be?' and she feigned to be thinking.

Most cruel must her thoughts have been, and even she hesitated a moment ere she could bring herself to such an act. Then with a contemptuous 'Pshaw!' she arose and opened her jewel box took from a private drawer a plain gold ring, bearing date nine years back, and having inscribed upon it simply her name 'Marie.' This she brought to Rosamond, saying, 'I can't wear it now;—my hands are too thin and bony, but it just fits you,—see—' and she placed it upon the third finger of Rosamond's left hand!

Rosamond thanked her—admired the chaste beauty of the ring and then went on with her packing, while the wicked woman seated herself by the window and leaning her head upon her hands tried to quiet the voice of

conscience which had cried out against the deed she had done.

'It does not matter,' she thought. 'That tie was severed years ago,—by his own act, too. The king shall go. But will he see it! Men do not always observe such things,' and then, lest he should not quaff the cup of bitterness prepared for him, she wrote on a tiny sheet of gilt-edged paper, 'Look on Rosamond's third finger.'

This she carefully sealed and gave to Rosamond, bidding her hand it to Mr. Browning, and saying in answer to her look of inquiry, 'It is about a little matter concerning yourself. He can show it to you, if he thinks proper!'

'The omnibus, Miss, for the cars,' cried a servant at the door, and with a hurried good-bye to her friends, Rosamond departed and was soon on her way to Riverside.

CHAPTER VII.

MAKING LOVE.

An accident had occurred to the downward train, and Rosamond was detained upon the road for a long time, so that it was already dark when she reached the Granby depot. Wishing to surprise Mr. Browning, she started for home on foot, leaving her trunks in charge of the baggage master. All around the house was still, and stepping into the hall she was about passing up the stairs, when the parlour door suddenly opened, throwing a glare of light upon her face. The same instant some one caught her round the neck, and kissing her twice, only released her when she exclaimed, 'Mr. Browning, I am surprised at you!'

'Mr. Browning? Thunder! Just as though I was my uncle!' cried a familiar voice, and looking at the speaker, Rosamond recognized Ben Van Vechten! He had come to Riverside the day previous, he said, and hearing she was expected, had waited at the depot four mortal hours, and then returned in disgust.

'But how did you know me?' she asked, and he replied, 'By your daguerreotype, of course. There is but one such beautiful face in the whole world.'

He was disposed to be complimentary, and Rosamond was not sorry when his mother appeared, for in her presence he was tolerably reserved. Mrs. Van Vechten greeted Rosamond politely, but the old hauteur was there, and her manner seemed to say, 'If you are educated and refined, I can't forget that you were once my waiting-maid.'

'Where is Mr. Browning?' asked Rosa-

mond, and Ben replied, 'Oh, up in his den having the snakes. He mopes there all the time. Can't you break him of the blues?'

'I'll go and try,' answered Rosamond, and she started up the stairs, followed by Ben whose mother called him back, bidding him, in a low voice, 'stay where he was, and not make a fool of himself.'

She could trust her brother, but not her son, and she thus did the former the greatest favour she could have done—she let him meet young Rosamond Leyton alone. The evening was quite chilly for July, and as, since the receipt of Miss Porter's note, Mr. Browning had seemed rather agueish, there was a fire burning in the grate, and it cast its shadows upon him as he sat in his accustomed chair. His back was toward the door, and he knew nothing of Rosamond's return until two, soft, white hands were placed before his eyes, and a voice which tried to be unnatural, said, 'Guess who I am.'

'Rosamond—darling—have you come back to me again?' he exclaimed, and starting up, he wound his arm about her, and looked into her face, expecting, momentarily, to hear her say, 'Yes, I know it all.'

But Rosamond did not say so. She merely told him how glad she was to be at home once more, in her delight forgetting that Marie Porter had said she loved the man who held her closely to his side and smoothed her wavy hair even while his heart throbbed painfully with memories of the past and trembled for the future. He longed to speak of her room-mate, but he dared not betray his knowledge of her existence, and he sat there waiting, yet dreading to hear the hated name.

'Did you room alone?' he asked at last, and now remembering the words, 'You do love him,' Rosamond moved quickly from his side. 'She does know,' he thought, and a silent moan of anguish died upon his lips. But Rosamond did not know—the movement was actuated by mere maidenly reserve, and sitting down directly opposite him, she told him of Miss Porter, whom she said she liked so well.

'How much of an invalid is she?' asked Mr. Browning, when he could trust his voice to speak.

'Her health is miserable,' returned Rosamond, 'She has the heart disease, and her waiting-maid told me she was liable to die at any time if unusually excited.'

It might have been because Rosamond was there that Mr. Browning thought the room was brighter than it had been before, and quite calmly he listened while she told him more of her new friend.

'She seemed so interested in you, and in Riverside,' said Rosamond, 'and even proposed coming home with me—'

Mr. Browning started suddenly, and as suddenly a coal snapped out upon the carpet. This was an excuse for his movement, and Rosamond continued, 'She thought, though, you might not care to see her, being a stranger, but she sent you her love, and— You are cold, ain't you, Mr. Browning? You shiver like a leaf. Ben said you'd had the ague.'

Rosamond closed the door and commenced again. 'Where was I? Oh, I know. She said if you were not a confirmed bachelor she would try her powers on you. "She was irresistible in her diamonds," she bade me tell you. But have you an ague chill, really? or what makes your teeth chatter so? Shall I ring for more coal?'

'No, Rosamond, no. Fire does not warm me; I shall better soon.'

Rosamond pitied him, he looked so white and seemed to be suffering so much, and she remained silent for a time. Then remembering the note, she handed it to him, and turning toward the fire, stooped down to fix a bit of coal which was in danger of dropping from the grate. While in this attitude a cry between a howl of rage and a moan of anguish fell upon her ear—her shoulders were grasped by powerful hands, and looking up she saw Mr. Browning, his face distorted with passion and his flashing eyes riveted upon the ring glittering in that firelight. Seizing her hand, he wrenched it from her finger, and glanced at the name—then, swift as thought, placed it upon the marble hearth and crushed it with his heel.

'It's mine—you've broken it,' cried Rosamond, but he did not heed her, and gathering up the pieces, he hurled them into the grate—then, pale as ashes, sank panting into the nearest chair.

Rosamond was thunder-struck. She did not suppose he had had time to read the note and never dreaming there was any connection between that and his strange conduct, she believed him to be raving mad, and her first impulse was to fly. Her second thought however, was, 'I will not leave him. He has these fits often, now, I know, and that is why he sent for me. He knew I could quiet him, and I will.'

So Rosamond stayed, succeeding so far in soothing him that his eyes lost their savage gleam, and were suffused with a look of unnatural tenderness when they rested on her face. He did not ask her how she came by the ring for he knew it had been sent as an insult to him, and he felt a glow of satisfac-

tion in knowing that it was blackening on the grate. Ben's voice was now heard in the hall, as king if they intended staying there all night, and in a whisper Mr. Browning bade Rosamond go down and apologize for him. She accordingly descended to the parlour, telling Mrs. Van Vechten that her brother was too much indisposed to come down, and wished to be excused. Mrs. Van Vechten bowed coolly, and taking a book of prints, busied herself for awhile in examining them; then the book dropped from her hand—her head fell back—her mouth fell open, and Ben, who was anxiously watching her, knew by unmistakable sounds that she was fast asleep. It was now his time, and faithfully did he improve it, devoting himself so assiduously to Rosamond, that she was glad when a snore, louder and more prolonged than any which had preceded it started the lady herself, and produced symptoms of returning consciousness.

The next day, and the next, it was the same, and at the expiration of a week, Ben had determined either to marry Rosamond Leyton, or go to the Crimean War, this last being the bugbear with which he intended frightening his mother into a consent. He hardly dared disobey her openly for fear of disinheritance, and he would rather she should express her willingness to receive Miss Leyton as her daughter. He accordingly startled her one day by asking her to sanction his intended proposal to the young girl. Nothing could exceed Mrs. Van Vechten's amazement and contempt. She would never consent, and if Ben persisted in making so disgraceful an alliance, she would disinherit him at once. Ben knew she was in earnest, and so fell back upon the Crimean war as a last resort. 'He would go immediately—would start that very day for New York—he had money enough to carry him there,' and he painted so vividly 'death on a distant battle-field, with a ferocious Russian rifling his trowsers' pocket,' that his mother began to cry, though she still refused to relent.

'Choose, mother, choose,' said he. 'It's almost car time—Rosamond or the war,' and he drew on his heavy boots.

'Oh, Benjamin, you will kill me dead.'

'I know it. I mean to. Rosamond or the war!' and he buttoned up his coat preparatory to a start.

'Do, Ben, listen to reason.'

'I won't—I won't;—Rosamond or the war! I shall rush into the thickest of the fight, and be killed the first fire, of course, and black is so unbecoming to you.'

'Stop, I entreat. You know you are

afraid of cannons!' this was said beseechingly.

'Thunder, mother! No, I ain't! Rosamond or the war—choose quick. I hear the whistle at East Granby.'

He left the room—went down the stairs, out at the door, through the yard, and out into the avenue, while his distracted mother looked after him through blinding tears. She knew how determined he was when once his mind was made up, and she feared his present excitement would last until he was fairly shipped, and it was too late to return. He would never fight, she was sure, and at the first battle-sound he would fly, and be hung as a deserter, no doubt! This touched her pride. She would rather people should say of her boy that he married a milliner's daughter than that he was hung, and hurrying to the window just as Ben looked back, hoping for a signal, she waved her hand for him to return, calling out at the top of her voice, 'I relent—I relent.'

'I knew the Crimea would fetch her,' said Ben; 'lucky I thought of that,' and without going to his mother at all, he sought out Rosamond. Half an hour later he astonished the former by rushing into her presence, and exclaiming, 'She's refused me, mother; and she meant it, too. Oh, I shall die—I know I shall. Oh, oh, oh!' and Ben rolled on the floor in his frantic grief. As nearly as she could, Mrs. Van Vechten learned the particulars of his interview with Rosamond, and, though at first secretly pleased that he had been refused, she felt a very little piqued that her son should thus be dishonored, and when she saw how wretched it had made him, her feelings were enlisted in his behalf, and she tried to soothe him by saying that her brother had a great deal of influence with Rosamond, and they would refer the matter to him.

'Go now, mother. Don't wait a minute,' pleaded Ben, and Mrs. Van Vechten started for her brother's library.

She found him alone, and disclosed the object of her visit at once. Rosamond had refused her son, who, in consequence, was nearly distracted, and threatened going to the Crimean war—a threat she knew he would execute unless her brother persuaded Rosamond to revoke her decision, and think again.

Mr. Browning turned as white as marble, but his sister was too much absorbed in her own matters to heed his emotions, and she continued—

'Of course it will be mortifying to us all to have her in the family, and may be Ben will get over it, but they must be engaged somehow, or he'll go away. I'll send her

up to you immediately,' and she hurriedly left the room in quest of Rosamond. For a moment Mr. Browning sat like one stupefied; then, covering his face with his hands, he moaned, 'must this come upon me too? Must I, who love her so madly, bid her marry another? And yet what does it matter? She can never be mine—and if she marries Ben I can keep them with me always, and that vile woman will have no cause for annoying me. She said Rosamond loved me, but I pray Heaven that may not be so.'

A light tread echoed in the hall, and with each fall of those little feet, Ralph Browning's heart throbbed painfully. Another moment and Rosamond was there with him—her cheeks flushed—her eyelashes wet with tears, and her whole manner betrayed an unusual degree of excitement.

'I understand from your sister,' said she, 'that you wish me to marry Ben, or leave your house. I will do the latter, but the former—never! Shall I consider our interview at an end?'

She turned to leave the room, but Mr. Browning caught her dress, exclaiming, 'stay, Rosamond, and hear me. I never uttered such words to Mrs. Van Vechten. I do not wish you to marry Ben, unless you love him. Do you love him, Rosamond? Do you love anybody?'

This was not what he intended to say—but he had said it, and now he waited for her answer. To the first question it came in a decided 'no, I do not love him,' and to the last it came in burning blushes, stealing over her cheek—her forehead—her neck, and speaking in her down-cast eye. She had never believed that she did love her guardian until that he wished her to marry another—then it burst upon her in all its force, and she could no more conceal it now than she could stop the rapid beatings of her heart. He saw it all in her tell-tale face, and forgetting everything, he wound his arms around her, and drawing her to his side, whispered in her ear, 'Darling Rosamond, say that you love me. Let me hear that assurance once, and I shall be almost willing to die.'

'Ladies do not often confess an attachment until sure it is returned,' was Rosamond's answer, and doubly forgetful now of all the dreary past, Ralph Browning poured into her ear hot, burning words of love—hugging her closer and closer to him until through the open window came the sound of Mr. Peters' voice calling to the stranger girl who had that morning entered service at Riverside as a waiting-maid in general. Maria was the name, and as the ominous word fell

upon Mr. Browning's ear, he started, and pushing Rosamond from him, turned his face away so she could not see the expression of mute despair settling down upon it. Sinking upon the lounge he buried his face in its cushions while Rosamond looked curiously upon him, feeling sure that she knew what it was that so affected him. He had told her of his love—had said that she was dearer to him than his life, and in confessing in this he had forgotten the dark shadow upon his life, and it was the dread of telling it to her—the pain of saying 'I love you, but you cannot be my wife,' which affected him so strangely. But she knew it all, and she longed to assure him of her sympathy. At last when he seemed to be more calm, she stole up to him, and kneeling at his side bent over him so that her bright hair mingled with his own.

'Mr. Browning,' she whispered softly, 'I know your secret, and I do not love you less.'

'You, Rosamond, you know it!' he exclaimed, gazing fixedly at her. 'It cannot be. You would never do as you have done.'

'But I do know it,' she continued, taking both his hands in hers, and looking him steadily in the eye, by way of controlling him, should he be seized with a sudden attack, 'I know exactly what it is, and though it will prevent me from being your wife, it will not prevent me from loving you just the same, or from living with you either. I shall stay here always—and—and—pardon me, Mr. Browning, but when you get furious, as you sometimes do, I can quiet you better than any one else, and it may be, the world will never need to know you are a madman!'

Mr. Browning looked searchingly into her innocent eyes, and then, in spite of himself, he laughed aloud. He understood why she should think him a madman, and though he repented of it afterward, he hastened to undeceive her now. 'As I hope to see another day, it is not that,' he said. 'It is far worse than insanity; and, Rosamond, though it breaks my heart to say it, it is wicked for me to talk of love to you, and you must not remember what I said. You must crush every tender thought of me. You must forget me—nay, more—you must hate me. Will you, Rosamond?'

'No—no—no,' she cried, and laying her face in his lap, she burst into a passionate flood of tears.

'Leave,' he whispered, 'or I shall go mad, for I know I am the cause of this distress.'

There was decision in the tones of his voice, and it stilled the tumult in Rosamond's

bosom. Rising to her feet, she said calmly, 'I will go, but I cannot forget that you deceived me. You have wrung from me a confession of my love, only to throw it back upon me as a priceless thing.'

Not thus would he part with her, and grasping her arm, he began, 'Heaven knows how much more than my very life I love you—'

He did not finish the sentence, for through the air a small, dark object came, and, missing its aim, dropped upon the hearth, where it was broken in a hundred pieces. It was a vase which stood upon the table in hall, and Ben Van Vechten's was the hand that threw it! Impatient at the delay, he had come up in time to hear his uncle's last words, which aroused his Southern blood at once, and seizing the vase, he hurled it at the offender's head—then, rushing down the stairs, he burst upon his mother with 'Great thunder! mother; Uncle Ralph is making love to Rosamond himself, and she likes it too. I saw it with my own eyes! I'll hang myself in the barn, or go to the Crimean war!' and Ben bounded up and down like an India-rubber ball. Suddenly remembering that another train was due ere long, he darted out of the house, followed by his distracted mother, who, divining his intention, ran swiftly after him, imploring him to return. Pausing for a moment, as he struck into the highway, he called out, 'Good-bye, mother. I've only one choice left—WAR! Give my love to Rosamond, and tell her I shall die like a hero. You needn't wear black, if you don't want to. Good-bye.'

He turned the corner—he had started for the war—and mentally resolving to follow him in the next train, Mrs. Van Vechten returned to the house, and sought her brother.

'Ralph,' she began sternly, 'have you talked of love to Rosamond?'

Mr. Browning had borne so much that nothing startled him now, and returning her glance unflinchingly, he replied, 'I have.'

'How, then—is Marie dead?' the lady asked.

'Not to my knowledge—but hist,' was the reply, as Mr. Browning nodded toward the hall, where a rustling movement was heard.

It was the new girl, coming with dust-pan and brush to remove the fragments of the vase, though how she knew they were there, was a question she alone could answer. For a single instant her dull, gray eye shot a gleam of intelligence at the occupants of the room, and then assuming her usual appear-

ance, she did what she came to do, and departed. When they were again alone, Mrs. Van Vechten demanded an explanation of her brother, who gave it unhesitatingly. Cold-hearted as she always seemed, Mrs. Van Vechten had some kind feelings left, and touched by her brother's tale of suffering, she gave him no word of reproach, and even unbent herself to say that a brighter day might come to him yet. Then she spoke of Ben, announcing her determination of following him that night. To this plan Mr. Browning offered no remonstrance, and when the night express left the Granby station, it carried with it Mrs. Van Vetchen, in pursuit of the runaway Ben.

CHAPTER VIII.

NEWS.

Nearly two weeks had passed away since the exciting scene in Mr. Browning's library, and during that time Rosamond had kept herself aloof from her guardian, meeting him only at the table, where she maintained toward him a perfectly respectful, but rather freezing manner. She was deeply mortified to think he had won from her a confession of her love, and then told her how useless—nay, worse—how wicked it was for her to think of him. She knew that he suffered intensely, but she resolutely left him as growing more and more a wearisome burden, and when, just one week after the library interview, he received a note in the well remembered handwriting, he asked that he might die and forget his grief. The letter was dated at the Springs, where Miss Porter was still staying, though she said she intended starting the next day for Cuyler, a little out-of-the-way place on the lake, where there was but little company, and she could be quiet and recruit her nervous system. The latter had been terribly shocked, she said, by hearing of his recent attempt at making love to Rosamond Leyton! 'Indeed,' she wrote, 'it is to this very love-making that you owe this letter from me, as I deem it my duty to keep continually before your mind the fact that I am still alive.'

With a blanched cheek Mr. Browning read this letter through—then tore it into fragments, wondering much who gave her the information. There were no spies about his premises. Rosamond would not do it, and it must have been his sister, though why she should thus wish to annoy him he did not know, when she, more than any one else, had been instrumental in placing him where he was. Once he thought of telling Rosamond all, but he shrank from this, for

she would leave his house, he knew, and, though she might never again speak kindly to him, he would rather feel that she was there.

And so another dreary week went by, and then one morning there came to him tidings which stopped for one instant the pulsations of his heart, and sent through his frame a thrill so benumbing and intense that at first pity and horror were the only emotions of which he seemed capable. It came to him in a newspaper paragraph, which in substance was as follows;

'A sad catastrophe occurred on Thursday afternoon at Cuyler, a little place upon the lake, which of late has been somewhat frequented during the summer months. Three ladies and one gentleman went out in a small pleasure-boat which is kept for the accommodation of the guests. They had not been gone very long when a sudden thunder-gust came on, accompanied by a violent wind, and the owner of the skiff, feeling some alarm for the safety of the party, went down to the landing just in time to see the boat make a few mad plunges with the waves, and then capsize at the distance of nearly half a mile from the shore.

'Every possible effort was made to save the unfortunate pleasure-seekers, but in vain; they disappeared from view long before a boat could reach them. One of the bodies has not yet been recovered. It is that of a Miss Porter, from Florida. She had reached Cuyler only the day previous, and was unaccompanied by a single friend, save a waiting-maid, who seems overwhelmed with grief at the loss of her mistress.'

This, then, was the announcement which so affected Ralph Browning, blotting out for a moment the wretched past, and taking him back to the long ago when he first knew Marie Porter and fancied that he loved her. She was dead now—dead. Many a time he whispered that word to himself, and with each repetition the wish grew stronger within him—not that she were living, but that while living he had not hated her so bitterly, and with the softened feeling which death will always bring, he blamed himself far more than he did her. There had been wrong on both sides, but he would rather now that she had been reconciled to him ere she found that watery grave. Hand in hand with these reflections came another thought; bewildering, intoxicating thought. He was free at last—free to love—to worship—to marry Rosamond.

'And I will go to her at once,' he said, after the first hour had been given to the dead; 'I will tell her all the truth.'

He rose to leave the room, but something

staid him there, and whispered in his ear, 'There may be some mistake. Cuyler is not far away. Go there first and investigate.'

For him to will was to do, and telling Mrs. Peters he should be absent from home for a time, he started immediately for Cuyler, which he reached near the close of the day. Calm and beautiful looked the waters of the lake on that summer's afternoon, and if within their caverns the ill-fated Marie slept, they kept over her an unruffled watch and told no tales of her last dying wail to the careworn, haggard man who stood upon the sandy beach, where they said that she embarked, and listened attentively while they told him how gay she seemed that day, and how jestingly she spoke of the dark thunder-head which even then was mounting the western horizon. They had tried in vain to find her, and it was probable she had sunk into one of the unfathomable holes with which the lake was by some thought to abound. Sarah, the waiting maid, wept passionately, showing that the deceased must have had some good quality, or she could not thus have attached a servant to her.

Looking upon Mr. Browning as a friend of her late mistress, she relied upon him for counsel, and when he advised her immediate return to Florida, she readily consented, and started on the same day that he turned his face towards Riverside. They had said to him, 'If we find her, shall we send her to your place?' and with an involuntary shudder he had answered, 'No—oh, no. You must apprise me of it by letter, as also her Florida friends—but bury her quietly her.'

They promised compliance with his wishes, and feeling that a load was off his mind, he started at once for home. Certainty now was doubly sure. Marie was dead, and as this conviction became more and more fixed upon his mind, he began to experience a dread of telling Rosamond all. Why need he know of it, when the telling it would throw much censure on himself. She was not a great newspaper reader—she had not seen the paragraph, and would not see it. He could tell her that the obstacle to his happiness had been removed—that 'twas no longer a sin for him to think of her or seek to make her his wife. All this he would say to her, but nothing more.

And all this he did say to her in the summer-house at the foot of the garden, where he found her just as the sun was setting. And Rosamond listened eagerly—never questioning him of the past, or caring to hear of it. She was satisfied to know that she might love him now, and with his arm

around her, she sat there alone with him until the August moon was high up in the heavens. He called her his 'sunshine'—his 'light'—his 'life,' and pushing the silken curls from off her childish brow, kissed her again and again, telling her she should be his wife when the twentieth day of November came. That was his twenty-ninth birth-day, and looking into her girlish face, he asked her if he were not too old. He knew she would tell him no, and she did, lovingly, caressing his grayish hair.

'He had grown young since he sat there,' she said, and so, indeed, he had, and the rejuvenating process continued day after day, until the villagers laughingly said that his approaching marriage had put him back ten years. It was known to all the town's folks now, and unlike most other matches, was pronounced a suitable one. Even Mrs. Van Vechten, who had found Ben at Lovejoy's Hotel, and still remained with him in New York, wrote to her brother a kind of congratulatory letter, mingled with sickly sentimental regrets for the 'heart-broken, deserted and now departed Marie.' It was doubtful whether she came up to the wedding or not, she said, as Ben had positively refused to come, or to leave the city either, and kept her constantly on the watch lest he should elope with a second-rate actress at Laura Keane's theatre.

Rosamond laughed heartily when Mr. Browning told her of this sudden change in Ben, and then with a sigh as she thought how many times his soft, good-natured heart would probably be wrung, she went back to the preparations for her bridal, which were on a magnificent scale. They were going to Europe—they would spend the winter in Paris, and as Mr. Browning had several influential acquaintances there, they would of course see some society, and he resolved that his bride should be inferior to none in point of dress, as she was to none in point of beauty. Everything which love could devise or money procure was purchased for her and the elegance of her outfit was for a long time the only theme of village gossip.

Among the members of the household none seemed more interested in the preparations than the girl Maria, who has before been incidentally mentioned. Her dull eyes lighted up with each new article of dress, and she suddenly displayed so much taste in everything pertaining to a lady's toilet, that Rosamond was delighted and kept her constantly with her, devising this new thing and that, all of which were invariably tried on and submitted to the inspection of Mr. Browning who was sure to approve whatever hi

Rosamond wore. And thus gayly sped the halcyon hours, bringing at last the fading leaf and the wailing October wind ; but to Rosamond, basking in the sunlight of love, there came no warning note to tell her of the dark November days which were hurrying swiftly on.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GUEST AT RIVERSIDE.

The November days had come. The satin dress was made—the bridal veil sent home—the wreath of orange, too ; and then one morning when the summer, it would seem, had come to revisit the scenes of its brief reign, Mr. Browning kissed his bride elect, and wiped away the two big tears which dropped from her eyelashes when he told her that he was going away for that day and the next.

'But when to-morrow's sun is setting, I shall be with you again,' he said, and he bade her quiet the fluttering of her little heart, which throbbed so painfully at parting with him.

'I don't know why it is,' she said, 'I'm not one bit superstitious, but Bruno howled so dismally under my window all night, and when he ceased, a horrid owl set up a screech. I told Maria, and she said, in her country the cry of an owl was a sign that the grave was about to give up its dead, and she looked so mysterious that she frightened me all the more—'

'That Maria is too superstitious, and I don't like her to be with you so much,' said Mr. Browning, his own cheek turning slightly pale as he thought of the grave giving up its dead. Thrice he turned back to kiss the little maiden, who followed him down the avenue, and then climbed into a box-like seat, which had been built on the top of the gate-post, and was sheltered by a sycamore. 'Here,' said she, 'shall I wait for you to-morrow night, when the sun is away over there. Oh, I wish it would hurry.'

He wished so, too, and with another fond good-bye they parted. The day seemed long to Rosamond, and, though she varied the time by trying on each and every one of the new dresses, she was glad when it was night, so she could go to bed and sleep the time away. The next morning the depression of spirits was gone ; he was coming—she should wait for him beneath the sycamore—possibly she would hide to make him believe she was not there, and the bright blushes stole over her dimpled cheeks as she thought what he would do when he found that she was there.

'Ten o'clock,' she said to herself, as she heard the whistle of the upward train. 'Seven hours more and he will come.'

Going to her room, she took a book, in which she tried to be interested, succeeding so well that, though her windows commanded a view of the avenue, she did not see the lady who came slowly up the walk, casting about her eager, curious glances, and pausing more than once to note the exceeding beauty of the place. Once she stopped for a long time, and, leaning against a tree, seemed to be debating whether to turn back or go on. Deciding upon the latter, she arose, and quickening her movements, soon stood upon the threshold. Her ring was answered by Maria, who betrayed no surprise, for from the upper hall Mrs. Peters was closely inspecting the visitor.

'Is Mr. Browning at home?' the lady asked.

'Gone to Buffalo,' was the laconic reply, and a gleam of satisfaction flitted over the face of the questioner, who continued : 'And the young lady, Miss Leyton? Has she gone, too?'

'She is here,' said Maria, still keeping her eye upon the shadow bending over the balustrade. 'What name shall I give her?'

'No name. I wish to surprise her,' and passing on into the parlour, the stranger laid aside her hat and shawl with the air of one perfectly at home ; then seating herself upon a sofa, she examined the room as curiously as she had examined the grounds of Riverside.

'It seems a pity to mar all this,' she said, 'and were it not that I hate him so much, I would go away forever, though that would be a greater injury to her than my coming to life will be. Of course he's told her all, and spite of her professed liking for me, she is glad that I am dead. I long, yet dread to see her amazement ; but hist—she comes.'

There was the sound of little, high-heeled slippers on the stairs, the flutter of a pink morning gown, and then Rosamond Leyton stood face to face with—Marie Porter ! The grave had given up its dead, and without any visible marks of the world prepared for such as she, save, indeed, the increased fire which burned in her black eyes, the risen woman sat there much as living people sit—her head bent forward—but her lips apart—and a look of expectation upon her face. But she was doomed to disappointment. Rosamond knew nothing of the past, and with a cry of pleasurable surprise she started forward, exclaiming, 'Oh, Miss Porter, I felt so cross when told a visitor was here, but now I know who 'tis, I am so glad, for I am very lonely to-day.'

The hard woman swept her hand a moment before her eyes, and with that movement swept away the kindly spirit, which whispered, 'Don't undeceive her. Don't quench the light of that bright face, nor break that girlish heart.'

But it was necessary; Marie Porter knew that, and though she repented of what she had done, it was now too late to retreat, and all she could do was to break the heart of the unsuspecting girl as tenderly as possible.

'Why are you so lonely?' she said, 'This is a most beautiful spot. I believe I'd like to live here myself.'

'Oh, yes, 'tis a lovely place,' answered Rosamond, 'but—but—Mr. Browning is not here,' and she averted her crimson face.

'Is Mr. Browning so necessary to your happiness?' Miss Porter asked, and bringing an ottoman, Rosamond sat down at her visitor's feet and thus replied: 'We talked so much of him at the Springs that it surely is not foolish in me to tell you what every body knows. Now, you won't laugh at me, will you? Mr. Browning and I are going to—oh, I can't tell it; but, any way, your fortune-telling is not true.'

'Mr. Browning and you are going to be married. Is that it?' the woman asked; and with a quick, upward glance of her soft, brown eyes, Rosamond replied, 'Yes, that's it—that's it; and oh, you can't begin to guess how happy I am. He is not crazy either. It was something else, though I don't know what, for he never told me, and I do not care to know. The obstacle has been removed, whatever it was, and it has wrought such a change in him. He's so much younger—handsomer, now, and so kind to me. I'm glad you've come, Miss Porter, and you'll stay till after the wedding. It's the twentieth, and he has bought me so many new things. We are going to Europe. Just think of a winter in Paris, with Mr. Browning! But, what! Are you crying?' and Rosamond started as a burning tear fell upon her forehead.

'Rosamond Leyton,' said Miss Porter, in a voice husky with emotion, 'I have not wept in eight long years, but the sight of you, so innocent, so happy, wrings the tears from my stony heart, as agony will sometimes force out the drops of perspiration when the body is shivering with cold. I was young like you once, and my bridal was fixed—' She paused, and stealing an arm around her waist, Rosamond said pleadingly, 'Tell me about it, Miss Porter, I always knew you had a history. Did the man die?'

'No—no. Better for me if he had—aye, and better, too, for you.'

This last was a whisper, and Rosamond did not hear it. Her thoughts were bent upon the story, and she continued, 'Will it pain you too much to tell it now?'

'Yes, yes, wait,' Miss Porter said, 'Wait until after dinner, and meantime, as I cannot possibly stay until the 20th, perhaps you will let me see your dresses.'

Nothing could please Rosamond more, and gay as a little child, she led the way to a large upper room, which contained her wedding outfit. Proudly she displayed her treasures, flitting like a bird from one pile of finery to another, and reserving the most important until the very last.

'There's the dinner-bell,' she suddenly exclaimed, 'I did not think it could be one. Only four hours more—but come, let us go down and after dinner, if you'll never tell Mrs. Peters, nor any body, I'll try on my bridal dress and let you see if it is becoming. I want so much to know how it looks, since Maria put the rosebuds in the berthe. And then your story. I must hear that.'

As they were going down the stairs Miss Porter took Rosamond's hand and said, 'How is this?—Where is my ring?'

Rosamond could not tell her of an act which now that it no longer had insanity for an excuse, puzzled her not a little. So she made some trivial excuse, which, however, did not deceive her auditor. But the latter deemed it wise to say no more just then, and silently followed her young friend into the dining-room. Dinner being over they went up to Rosamond's chamber, the closet of which contained the bridal robes.

'Two o'clock,' said Rosamond, consulting her watch, then bringing out the rich white satin and exquisite overskirt of lace, she continued, 'I shall have just time to try this on, hear your story and get dressed before Mr. Browning comes. How short the day seems, with you here! I told him I'd be sitting in that little box which you possibly noticed, built on the gate-post against the tree.—And he'll be so disappointed not to find me there, that maybe you won't mind my leaving you awhile when the sun is right over the woods.'

'Certainly not,' answered Miss Porter, and the dressing-up process began, Rosamond chatting gayly all the while and asking if it were very foolish for her to try on the dress. 'I should not do it,' she said, 'if you would stay. Can't you?'

The answer was a decided negative, and adjusting her little slipper, Rosamond stood up while her companion put over her head

the satin dress. It fitted admirably, and nothing could have been fairer than the round, clubby arms and plump, well-shaped shoulders which the short comings of the dress showed to good advantage. Now the lace over-skirt—now the berthe—and then the veil, with the orange-wreath twined among the flowing curls, and Rosamond was dressed at last.

'How do I look?' she asked, but Marie Porter made no immediate reply, and as she gazed upon the young girl, so beautiful, so innocent and unsuspecting, who can tell of the keen anguish at her heart, or how she shrank from the bitter task which she must do, and quickly, too, for the clock pointed to three, and her plan was now to strike the dove and then flee ere the eagle came. She would thus wound him more deeply, for the very uncertainty would add fresh poison to his cup of agony.

'How do I look?' Rosamond asked again, and after duly complimenting the dress, Miss Porter added, 'I promised you my story, and if I tell it at all to-day, I must begin it now, for it is long, and I would finish it ere Mr. Browning comes.'

'Very well, I'm all attention,' said Rosamond, and like a lamb before its slaughterer she knelt before the woman, bending low her graceful head to have the wreath removed.

This done, Miss Porter said, 'have you any camphor handy, hartshorn? I am some times faint and may want them.'

'Yes, both, here, in the bathing-room,' said Rosamond, and she brought them to the lady, who placed them upon the table—not for herself, but for one who would need them more—for poor, poor Rosamond. The disrobing proceeded slowly, for the little girl was well pleased with the figure reflected by the mirror. But Miss Porter could not wait, and when the wreath, the veil, and berthe were removed, she seated herself by the window in a position which commanded a full view of her victim's face; and forcing down the throbbings of her heart, which it seemed to her were audible in that silent room, she commenced the story.

CHAPTER X.

THE STORY.

'My home,' began Miss Porter, 'is, as you know, in Florida. I am an only child, as were both my parents, so that I have now living no nearer relative than a great-uncle—a superannuated clergyman, who superintends my affairs, and who, in case I die

before he does, which is very probable, will be heir to my possessions.'

'It is now nearly ten years since my father started for Europe, and I went to an adjoining state to visit a widow lady, whom I had met in New Orleans the winter previous. It is not necessary that I should use real names, consequently I will call her Mrs. Le Vert. She was spending the summer on her plantation, which she called her country-seat. It was a large, old-fashioned, wooden building, many miles from any neighbors, and here she lived alone—for her only son, a lad twelve years of age, was at some northern school. At first I was very lonely, for the secluded life we led at Holly Grove was hardly in accordance with the taste of a young girl. Still, I did not mind it as much as some, for I cared but little for gentlemen's society, and had frequently declared that I should never marry.'

'Towards the last of July, Mrs. Le Vert's brother came to visit her. He was a handsome, boyish-looking youth, six months older than myself—just out of college—full of life and very fond of pretty girls, particularly if they chanced to be wealthy.'

'That's a little like Ben,' said Rosamond, and Miss Porter continued:

'From the first, Mrs. Le Vert seemed determined to make a match between us, for her brother was poor, and she fancied it would be a fine idea to have the Porters' estate come into the Dunlap family. So she threw us constantly together—talked of me to him and of him to me, until I really began to believe I liked him. He, on the contrary, cared for nothing but my money. Still he deemed it advisable to assume a show of affection, and one night talked to me of love quite eloquently. I had been to a dinner party that day, and had worn all my diamonds. He had never seen them before, and they must have inflamed his avarice, for I afterwards heard him tell his sister that he never should have proposed if I had not looked so beautiful that night. I was irresistible in my diamonds,' he said.'

Miss Porter paused a moment to witness the effect of her last words, but Rosamond was looking over her shoulder at a wrinkle she had just discovered in the waist, and did not heed them. Still she was listening, and she said, 'Yes—go on. You were looking beautifully that night. Did you consent to marry him?'

'Unhappily, I did,' returned Miss Porter, 'for I had made myself believe that I loved him. I wished that he was older, to be sure, but he said we would wait until he was of age. This plan, however, did not suit his ambitious sister. She knew I intended

asking my father's approval, and from what she heard of him she feared he would never consent to my marrying a poor student, and she urged an immediate union. But I persisted in writing to my father, who answered immediately, forbidding me to think of young Dunlap, ordering me to go home, and saying he always intended me for John Castwell, a neighbour of ours—a millionaire—a booby—a fool—whom I hated as I did poison.

'Not long after the receipt of this letter I was surprised by the sudden appearance of Uncle Bertram, who had come at my father's request to take me home. This roused me at once. My father was a tyrant, I said, and I would let him know I could do as I pleased. In my excitement, I fancied I could not exist a moment without Richard Dunlap, while he declared that life would be a blank for him if passed away from me. At this moment Mrs. Le Vert suggested that we be married immediately—that very night. Uncle Bertram fortunately was a clergyman, and could officiate as well as any other. In justice to Richard, I will say that he hesitated longer than I did—but he was persuaded at last, as was Uncle Bertram, and with no other witness than Mrs. Le Vert and a white woman who lived with her as half waiting-maid and half companion, we were married.'

Rosamond was interested now, and forgetting to remove her dress, she threw a crimson shawl around her shoulders, and sitting down upon the bed, exclaimed, 'Married! You married! Why, then, are you called Porter?'

'Listen and you shall know,' returned the lady, a dark look setting down upon her face.

'Scarcely was the ceremony over, when I began to regret it—not because I disliked Richard, but because I dreaded my father's displeasure, for he had a most savage, revengeful temper, and his daughter possesses the same.' This was bitterly spoken, and she continued—'Hardly an hour after we were married, a negro brought a letter to Richard from an eccentric old man for whom he had been named. In it the old man said he had made his namesake his heir, provided he did not marry until he was twenty-five.'

'“I know just how frolickin' you are,” he wrote, “and I know, too, how unsuitable and how unhappy most early marriages are—so my boy, if you want Sunnyside, wait till you are twenty-five before you take an extra rib. I hate to be bothered with letters, and if you don't answer this, I shall conclude that you accept my terms.”'

'Mrs. Le Vert at once suggested that, as the old gentleman had already had two fits of

apoplexy, and would undoubtedly soon have the third, our marriage should for a time be kept a secret.'

'But he didn't consent,' cried Rosamond.

'Yes, he did,' answered Miss Porter, 'and though I, too, said it would be best, I began to distrust him from that moment—to think that he preferred money to myself. Uncle Bertram promised secrecy and went back alone, and then commenced a life of wretchedness, which makes me shudder even to recall it. With the exception of my own servant, who dared not tell if I bade her be silent, the blacks knew nothing of our marriage, and though we lived together as man and wife, so skillfully did Mrs. Le Vert and Esther, her white domestic manage the matter, that for a time our secret was safely kept. A few of the negroes discovered it ere I left; but as they always lived in that out-of-the-way place, it never followed me, and to this day no human being in Florida, save Uncle Bertram, knows of the marriage.'

'I am very impulsive, and the excitement being over, my affections began to cool. Richard could have kept it alive had he tried, but he did not. On the contrary he was alone, and when with me was always tormenting me with conscientious scruples about deceiving “the old man.”'

'Oh, I like him for that,' cried Rosamond, 'I like him for that. Why didn't you let him tell?'

'Because,' returned Miss Porter, 'I had fears that father would disinherit me, and if Richard lost Sunnyside, we should be poor indeed.'

A shadow passed over Rosamond's face, and she said involuntarily, 'I could be happy with Mr. Browning if we were poor.'

'Marie started and answered quickly, 'What has Mr. Browning to do with my story?'

'Nothing, nothing,' returned Rosamond, 'only I was thinking that if you loved Richard as well as I do Mr. Browning, you would not have cared for money.'

'But I didn't,' returned Marie. 'I was mistaken. 'Twas a mere childish fancy. I never loved him. I hate him now.'

She spoke vehemently, and when Rosamond said mournfully, 'Hate your husband?' she replied, 'Yes, more than hate, or I had never come to tell you this: but listen—from indifference we came to coldness—from coldness to recrimination—from that to harsh words—from harsh words to quarrels—and from quarrels to blows!'

She uttered the last word slowly, while Rosamond exclaimed, 'Not blows, Miss Porter! No man would strike a woman, almost hate him, now.'

The proud lip curled scornfully—a gleam of satisfaction shot from the keen black eyes, and Marie went on. 'He would say—nay, does say I was the most to blame—that I aggravated him beyond human endurance—but he provoked me to it. Think of his swearing at me, Rosamond—calling me a she devil and all that. Think, too, of his telling me to my face that he was driven into the marriage wholly by his sister—that he regretted it more than I, and to crown all, think of his boxing my ears!—he, a poor, insignificant Northern puppy, boxing me—a Porter, and a Southern heiress!'

She was terribly excited, and Rosamond, gazing at her face, distorted with malignant passion, began to fancy that the greater wrong might perhaps have lain with her.

After a moment's pause, Marie began again. 'When we had been three months man and wife, he wrote to the old man, confessing his marriage, and saying sundry things not wholly complimentary to his bride; but I intercepted it, read it, tore it up, and taunted him with it. I believe I called him a low-lived Yankee, or something like that, and then it was he struck me. The blow sunk deep into my soul. It was an insult, an unpardonable insult, and could not be forgiven. My Southern blood was all on fire, and had I been a man, he should have paid for that blow. I feel it yet; the smart has never for a moment left me, but burns upon my face just as hatred for him burns upon my heart!'

'Oh, Miss Porter,' cried Rosamond, as the former ground her teeth together, 'don't look so terrible. You frighten me. He struck you, but he asked your pardon sure?'

'Yes, he pretended to, but I spat at him and bade him leave me for ever. His sister tried to interfere but she made the matter worse, and as my father was on the eve of embarking for America, I determined to go home, and when he came, tell him the whole truth and ask him to seek satisfaction from one who had dared to strike his daughter. Richard made a show of trying to keep me—said we had better live together and all that, while his sister called us two silly children who needed whipping. But I did not heed it. I went home to Uncle Bertram and waited for my father, who never came. He died upon the sea, and I was heir of all his vast possessions. Then Richard made overtures for reconciliation, but I spurned them all. You've heard of woman-haters, Rosamond—I am a man-hater. I loathe the whole sex, Uncle Bertram excepted. My marriage was of course a secret in Florida. My servant, who knew of it, died soon after

my father, and as Uncle Bertram kept his own counsel, more than one sought my hand, but I turned my back upon them all.

'Four or five years ago he wrote me a letter. He was then master of Sunnyside, for the old man left it to him after all. He was lonely there, he said, and he asked a reconciliation. Had he never struck me, I might have gone, for his letter was kindly enough, but the blow was a barrier between us, so I refused to listen, and exulted over the thought of his living there alone all his days, with the secret on his mind.

'The sweetest morsel of all in the cup of revenge was, however, for a time withheld, but it came at last, Rosamond. It came at last. He loved a beautiful young girl, loved her all the more that he could not marry her.'

She drew nearer to Rosamond, who though still unsuspecting, trembled from head to foot with an undefinable emotion of coming evil.

'I saw her, Rosamond; saw this young girl with his name upon her lips when waking—saw her, too, with his name upon her lips when sleeping, and all this while she did not dream that I, the so-called Marie Porter, was his wife, the barrier which kept him from saying the words her little heart longed so to hear.'

There were livid spots on Rosamond's neck—livid spots upon her face, and still she did not move from her seat, though her clammy hand clutched nervously her bridal dress. A horrid suspicion had flashed upon her, but with a mighty effort she threw it off as injustice to Mr. Browning, and mentally crying, 'It cannot be,' she faintly whispered, 'Go on.'

'The summer I met her,' said Miss Porter, 'I was at Cartersville, a little out-of-the-way place on a lake—'

'You're telling me true?' interrupted Rosamond, joy thrilling in her tones.

'Yes, true,' returned Miss Porter.

'Then bless you—bless you for those last words,' rejoined Rosamond, burying her face in her companion's lap. 'A terrible fear for a moment came over me, that it might be I. But it isn't. I met you at the Springs. Oh, if it had been me, I should most surely die.'

'But she did not—the young girl,' resumed Miss Porter. 'She had a brave, strong heart, and she bore up wonderfully. She felt that he had cruelly deceived her, and that helped her to bear the blow. Besides, she was glad she knew of it in time, for, had he married her, she would not have been his wife, you know.'

Rosamond shuddered and replied, 'I know,

but my heart would have broken all the same. It aches so now for her. But go on, how did she find it out? Who could have strength to tell her?"

There was a pause, and each could hear the beating of the other's heart. The November wind had risen within the last half hour, and now howled dismally past the window, seeming to Rosamond like the wail that young girl must have uttered when she first learned how her trust had been betrayed. The clock struck four! Rosamond counted each stroke, and thought, 'One hour more and he will be here.' Marie counted each stroke, and thought, 'One hour more, and I must be gone.'

'Rosamond,' she began again, 'what I now have to confess is an act of which I have repented bitterly, and never more than since I sat within this room. But it was premeditated, and believe me, Rosamond, it was not done for any malice I bore to that young girl, for I pitied her so much—oh, so much,' and her hand wandered caressingly over the bright hair lying on her lap.

'We went out one afternoon—two ladies, a gentleman, and myself—in a small sail-boat upon the lake. I planned the excursion and thought I should enjoy it, but we had not been out long when my old affection of the heart began to trouble me. I grew faint, and begged of them to put me on the land. They complied with my request, and set me down upon a point higher up than from which we had embarked, and near to a dilapidated cabin where lived a weird old hag, who earned a scanty livelihood by fortune-telling. I told her I was sick, and sat down by her door where I could watch the movements of the party. Suddenly a terrific thunder-storm arose, the wind blew a hurricane, and though the boat rode the billows bravely for a time, it capsized at length, and its precious freight disappeared beneath the foaming wave. For a moment horror chilled my blood; then, swift as the lightning which leaped from the cloud overhanging the graves of my late companions, a maddening thought flashed upon my mind.'

'But the girl—hasten to the part,' said Rosamond, lifting up her head, while Miss Porter went back to her chair.

'I shall come to her soon enough,' returned Miss Porter, continuing her story. 'No living being, save the old woman at my side knew of my escape, and I could bribe her easily. Fortunately I carried the meat of my money about my person, and I said to her, "There are reasons why, for a time at least, I wish to be considered dead. Here are twenty dollars now, and the same shall

be paid you every month that you are silent. No human creature must know that I am living." I saw by the kindling of her eye at the sight of the gold that I was safe, and when the night shadows were falling I stole from her cabin, and taking a circuitous route to avoid observation, I reached the midway station in time for the evening train.

'Three days later in a distant city I read of the sad catastrophe—read that all had been found but one, a Miss Porter, from Florida, and as I read I thought "he will see that, too!" He did not see it. Before going to Cartersville I sent to Sunnyside a girl who was under peculiar obligations to me, and one whom I could trust. She was employed at last about the person of that young girl, who had lived at Sunnyside since she was a child, a friendless orphan.'

There was a quick, gasping moan as if the soul were parting from the body and Rosamond fell upon face which the pillows concealed from view, while Miss Porter hurriedly proceeded:

'That is but little more to tell. I wrote to the girl who took her own letters from the office. I told her all, and from her heard that the bridal day was fixed. The obstacle was removed—not insanity, but a living wife. Need I say more?"

She paused, but from the bed where the crushed, motionless figure lay, there came no sound, and she said again. 'Speak Rosamond. Curse me, if you will, for saving you from an unlawful marriage.'

Still there was no sound, save the low sighing of the wind, which seemed to have taken a fresh note of sadness as if bewailing the unutterable desolation of the young girl, who lay so still and lifeless that Marie Porter's heart quickened with fear, and drawing near, she touched the little hand resting on the pillow. It was cold—rigid—as was also the face which she turned to the light.

'It is death!' she cried, and a wild shriek rang through the house, bringing at once the servants, headed by Mrs. Peters.

'What is it?' cried the latter, as she saw the helpless figure and beautiful upturned face.

'It's death, madam—death, and it's coming on me, too,' answered Miss Porter, clasping her hands over her heart, which throbbed as it never had done before, and which at last prostrated her upon the lounge.

But no one heeded her, save the girl Maria. The rest gave their attention to Rosamond, who lay so long in the death-like stupor

that others than Miss Porter believed her dead.

The clock struck five! and echoing from the Granby hills the engine whistle came. Then a slight tremor ran through her frame, and Mrs. Peters whispered joyfully 'There's life—there's hope.'

Along the highway the returning traveller came with rapid tread, but 'neath the sycamore no Rosamond was waiting.

'She is hiding from me,' he said, but his search for her was in vain, and he rapidly hastened on.

All about the house was still. There was no Rosamond at the door—nor in the hall—nor in the parlor—nor on the stairs; but from her chamber came the buzz of voices, and he entered unannounced, recoiling backwards when he saw the face upon the pillow, and knew that it was Rosamond's. Every particle of colour had left it; there were dark circles beneath the eyes, and a look about the mouth as if the concentrated agony of years had fallen suddenly upon her.

'What is it?' he asked, and at the sound of his voice, the brown eyes he had been wont to call so beautiful unclosed, but their sunny brightness was all gone, and he shuddered at their dim, meaningless expression.

She seemed to know him, and stretching her arm toward him as a child does towards its mother when danger threatens, she laid her head upon his bosom with a piteous wail—the only really audible sound she had yet uttered.

'Rosamond, darling—what has come upon you?' he said, 'and why are you in your bridal dress?'

At that word she started, and moving away from him, moaned sadly, 'It was cruel—oh, so cruel to deceive me, when I loved and trusted him so much.'

'Won't somebody tell me what this means?' he demanded, and Mrs. Peters replied, 'We do not know. There's been a strange woman here, and she was with Rosamond when it happened.'

'Woman? What woman? And where is she now?' he asked, and Mrs. Peters replied, 'She was faint—dying, she said, and Maria took her into another chamber.'

Mechanically he started for the chamber—hearing nothing—seeing nothing—thinking of the nameless terror that had fallen upon him. He did not suspect the real truth. He merely had a vague presentiment that some one who knew nothing of the drowning had come there to save his Rosamond from what they supposed to be an unlawful marriage, and when at last he stood face to face with his living wife, when he knew the grave had given up its dead, he dropped to the floor as

drops the giant oak when felled by the lightning's power!

Marie Porter, even had she been cruelly wronged, was avenged—fully, amply avenged, and covering her face with her hands, she moaned, 'I have killed them both, and there's nothing left for me now but to die!'

CHAPTER XL.

THE END.

Over the horrid awakening which came to the wretched man, we need not linger; neither is it necessary to dwell upon the first few days of mystery and dread, when death seemed brooding over Riverside, and rumour was busy with surmises and suspicion concerning the stranger, and the relation, if any, which she bore to Rosamond Leyton. We will rather hasten on to the morning when to Mr. Browning the joyful tidings came that Rosamond was better—so much better, indeed, that he could see and talk with her if he chose.

Only once since the fearful night when he found her moaning in her bridal dress, had he stood by her bedside—for, enough he longed to be there, he could not endure to see her turn away from him, whispering as she did so, 'It was cruel—oh, so cruel to deceive me so.' Neither had he been near Marie Porter, consequently he knew nothing of the means by which she had imposed upon him the story of her death. But Rosamond knew—Rosamond could tell him, and from no other lips would he hear it. So, when he learned that she was better, he asked to see her alone, and Mrs. Peters, to whom he had necessarily confided the story of his marriage, carried his message to Rosamond.

For a moment Rosamond did not seem to hear, but when the message was repeated, the great tears forced themselves from beneath her long eyelashes, and rolling down her cheeks, dropped upon the pillow.

'He might have spared me this,' she said, 'but if it is his wish, I can see him.'

With a mighty effort she stilled the violent throbbings of her heart, forced an unnatural calm upon her face and whispered—'Let him come now; I am ready.'

He was standing without the door, so near that he heard the words, and in a moment he was at her side. Falling upon his knees before her, he clasped her hands in his, imploring her forgiveness for the great wrong he had done her in not telling her the truth at first. 'But I am innocent of the last,' he said; 'believe me, Rosamond, I thought her dead, or I had never asked you to be my

wife. I know not how she deceived me so terribly, but you know, and I have sought this interview to hear the story from your own lips. Will you tell it to me, darling—Miss Leyton, I mean,' he added hastily, as he saw a shadow of pain flit over her face.

'I will if I can,' she faintly answered. and summoning all her strength, she repeated to him what Miss Porter had told her, except, indeed, the parts with which she knew he was familiar.

'The plot was worthy of her who planned it,' he said bitterly; then, as Rosamond made no reply, he continued—'she told you, I suppose, of our married life, and painted me the blackest villain that ever trod the earth. This may in part be true, but, Rosamond, though I may never know the bliss of calling you my wife, I cannot be thus degraded in your sight and offer no apology. I was a boy—a self-willed, high-tempered boy, nineteen years of age, and she aggravated me beyond all human endurance, seeking ways and means by which she could provoke me. I loved her at first—nay, do not turn away incredulously. Heaven is my witness that I loved her, or thought I did, but 'twas a boyish love, and not such as I feel for you.'

'You swore at her,' said Rosamond, unable to reconcile love with an oath.

'Once, only once,' he replied. I blush to own it, for it was not a manly act.'

'You struck her,' and for the first time since he had been in that room the brown eyes rested full upon his face.

'Yes, Rosamond,' he answered; 'I own that, too, but she goaded me to madness, and even raised her voice against my sainted mother, who had borne so dastardly a son as I?'

'And Riverside?' said Rosamond. 'Did your uncle die deceived?'

'Never—never,' Mr. Browning exclaimed, starting to his feet. 'I told the whole truth, or I would not have lived here a day. Rosamond, I have greatly sinned, but she has not been blameless. She insulted me in every possible way, even to giving you her wedding ring, and then, lest I should not see it, wrote to me "to look upon your finger." 'No wonder you thought me mad!'

'Her wedding ring! Could she do that?' said Rosamond.

'Yes, her wedding ring. It first belonged to Susan, who gave it to me for the occasion, and two weeks after I had it marked with Marie's name and the date of our marriage. It is broken now, and I would to Heaven I could thus easily break the tie which binds me to her, and keeps me from you! Oh,

Rosamond, Rosamond, must it be? Must I live my life without you, when I need you so much—when my heart longs so to claim you for its own?'

He covered his face with his hands, and Rosamond could see the tears droppings slowly through his fingers. Terribly was he expatiating the sin of his boyhood, and what wonder is it, if, in his agony, he cried, 'my punishment is greater than I can bear!'

Rosamond alone was calm. She seemed to have wept her tears away, and the blow which had fallen so crushingly upon her had benumbed her heart, so that she now did not feel as acutely as the weeping man before her. Very soothingly she spoke to him, but she offered no word of cheer—no hope that all would yet be well. 'They would bear it with brave hearts,' she said, 'and he must be reconciled to his wife.'

'Never—never,' he exclaimed. 'The same roof cannot shelter us both, and if she chooses to stay when she is better, she is welcome to Riverside, but I cannot share it with her.'

Neither said to the other, 'it may be she will die,' for such a thought had never intruded itself upon their minds, and yet Marie Porter's life was numbered now by days. The heart disease, from which she had long been suffering, was greatly aggravated by the strong nervous excitement through which she had recently been passing. Stimulants of a most powerful kind had created a kind of artificial strength, which had enabled her to come to Riverside, but this was fast subsiding; and when bent over the motionless form of Rosamond, and feared that she was dead, she felt, indeed, that death would ere long claim her as his own. The sight of her husband, too, had well-nigh been more than she could bear. For nearly nine long years she had not looked upon his face. His hair she remembered, too—his soft, dark, wavy hair, through which her fingers had sometimes strayed, in the far back days at Holly Wood, before she was his bride. He would not be greatly changed, she thought; and when, on that fatal night, she heard his coming footsteps, she pictured him in her mind much as he was that winter-day, when, standing in his sister's door, he bade her a long good-bye. Nearer and nearer he had come—faster and louder had beaten her heart, while a cold, faint sickness crept over her.

'Open the window—I cannot breathe,' she gasped; but ere her request was obeyed, Ralph Browning had fainted on the threshold, and she had asked that she might die.

She had seen him only for an instant, but that sufficed to tell her he was changed from the dark-haired, handsome boy, into the gray-haired, suffering man. His eyes had met hers, but the fierce hatred she expected was not there; and the look of utter hopeless despair which she saw in its place, touched her as reproach and resentment could not have done.

'Oh, I hope I shall die,' she said, as she hid her face in the pillow. 'I hope I shall die.'

This wish she uttered every hour; and when, at last, the physician said to her, 'Madam, you will die,' she answered, 'It is well!'

She did not ask for Mr. Browning, for she knew he would not come, but she inquired anxiously each day for Rosamond; and when, at last, she heard they were together, she laid her hand upon her heart, and watching its rise and fall, smiled to think how fast her life was going out.

'Listen, Maria,' she said, 'Listen to what they say, and hear if they talk of me.'

Noiselessly Maria glided to the door of Rosamond's chamber—stood there for a moment and then as noiselessly came back repeating to her mistress the substance of what she had heard, together with sundry little embellishments of her own.

'He will give you Riverside and go away himself,' she said, and Miss Porter quickly rejoined, 'Go where? Go with whom?'

'With Miss Leyton of course,' returned Maria. 'He said he would not live without her.'

'The wretch!' ejaculated the angry woman, all her softer emotions giving way to this fancied insult. 'He might at least wait now until I'm dead. I'll go to him myself, and see if in my presence he dare talk thus to her.'

She was greatly excited, and spite of the painful throbbings of her heart, and the dizzy sensation she felt stealing over her, she stepped upon the floor, and hurriedly crossed the room. The effort was too much for her feeble strength, and she sank fainting upon a chair. The girl Maria had seen her faint before, but never before had she seen so fearful a look upon her face, and she ran in terror to Mr. Browning, beseeching him to come 'for her mistress was dying sure, and would trouble nobody much more.'

For a moment he hesitated, but when Rosamond said 'Go,' he went. Taking the fainting woman in his arms he laid her upon the bed as gently, though not as tenderly as he would have lain his Rosamond there.

'Call Mrs. Peters,' he said, and when that matron came, he bade her give to the invalid every possible care.

Slowly Miss Porter came back to life, but it was only to faint again, and each fainting fit it became more and more apparent that life was ebbing fast. They did not say to Rosamond that she would die, but they told it to Mr. Browning, who heard as one who hears not. Every other sensation seemed to have given place to a feeling of horror, and when at the close of the second day word came to him that she was dying, and had asked to see him, he arose mechanically and walked to her sick room as calmly as he had visited it the previous night, when he knew she was asleep. One glance, however, at her white face and wild bright eyes roused him to the reality, and bending over her pillow, he forced himself to take her hand in his, saying kindly, 'Marie, do you know me?'

'Know you?' 'Yes,' she answered. 'You are my husband—my husband.' She lingered upon that name as if its sound recalled to life some olden feeling—some memory of Holly Wood, where they first had met.

'Marie, you are dying,' he continued. 'Shall we part in anger, or in peace?'

'In peace, if you will,' she answered. 'I have had my revenge—but it is not as sweet as some say it is. I would rather, Ralph, that I had never known you, for then I should not have been the wicked wretch I am.'

Mr. Browning did not reply to this, and for a few moments there was silence, during which she seemed to sleep. Rousing up ere long, she gasped for breath, and grasping nervously her husband's hand, she whispered, 'I am going now—there's no sham this time—five minutes more, and you are free to marry Rosamond. Be kind to her, Ralph. Deal with her not as you dealt with me, and—and—come closer to me, Ralph. Let me whisper this last so as no one can hear.'

He bent him down to listen, and summoning all her strength, she said, not in a whisper, but in tones which echoed through the silent room—'Never, never strike Rosamond, will you?'

Rapidly the story circulated that the strange woman who lay dead at Riverside had been Ralph Browning's wife, and hundreds flocked to the funeral, hoping to gain a view of the deceased. But in this they were disappointed, for there was nothing visible, save the handsome coffin, on whose silver plate was inscribed the word 'Marie.'

Some said that 'Browning' might have been added to the name. and while others

marvelled that the husband wore no badge of mourning, a few said wisely that the mourning was visible in other than the usual signs—in the hair gray before its time, and in the deep-cut lines which a living sorrow alone had made. And so, amid surmises of the past and foretellings of the future, the ill-fated Marie was laid in the village vault, until word could be received from her old uncle, who might wish to have her rest among the balmy groves and fragrant flowers of her beautiful Florida home.

And now our story winds to its close. Ralph Browning was free indeed, but death had been at Riverside, and the shadow it had left must disappear ere he took to himself a second bride. Rosamond, too, must recover from the blow which had fallen so crushingly on her—must learn to confide again in the man she loved—to think of the great wrong he had done her as the result of an early, boyish error which he regretted even more bitterly than herself.

And so the warm spring rains had fallen and the April blossoms were bursting from the dark, moist earth ere the wedding morning came. At the bridal there was no satin dress—no orange wreath—no flowing veil—but there was perfect love shining in the beautiful brown eyes of the girlish bride, while the fine face of the bridegroom wore a look of perfect happiness, as if the past were

all forgotten, and the world was bright and new. Europe was the destination, and among those who accompanied them to New York, going with them to the vessel's deck, none bade them a more affectionate adieu than Mrs. Van Vechten herself. She had spent part of the winter at Riverside, and had learned to appreciate the gentle girl whom she knew was to be her brother's wife.

Ben, too, was of the party. He had listened in amazement to the story of his uncle's first marriage, wondering how it could have been kept from him, and remembering several little incidents, the meaning of which now he understood. He had given up the Crimean war, as well as the dancing girl, and now he had given up Rosamond, too, but he bore it quite heroically, and ever after took especial pains to speak of her as 'My Aunt Rosamond.' For more than a year the bridal pair remained abroad, and then returned again to Riverside, where now the patter of tiny feet, and the voice of childhood is heard, for children have gathered around the hearthstone, and in all the world there is not a prouder, happier wife and mother than the little Rosamond who once on a dreary November day listened, with a breaking heart, to the story of Ralph Browning's Youthful Error.

THE END.

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